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D.D., LITT.D.

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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
TRUE SABBATH OBSERVANCE (Luke xiii. 10-17) . . .	1
THE STRAIT GATE (Luke xiii. 22-30) . . .	8
CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO HEROD (Luke xiii. 32, 33) . . .	14
THE LESSONS OF A FEAST (Luke xiv. 1-14) . . .	23
EXCUSES NOT REASONS (Luke xiv. 18) . . .	28
THE RASH BUILDER (Luke xiv. 28) . . .	38
THAT WHICH WAS LOST (Luke xv. 4, 8, 11) . . .	49
THE PRODIGAL AND HIS FATHER (Luke xv. 11-24) . . .	59
GIFTS TO THE PRODIGAL (Luke xv. 22, 23) . . .	65
THE FOLLIES OF THE WISE (Luke xvi. 8). . .	75
TWO KINDS OF RICHES (Luke xvi. 10-12) . . .	83
THE GAINS OF THE FAITHFUL STEWARD (Luke xvi. 12) . . .	92
DIVES AND LAZARUS (Luke xvi. 19-31) . . .	101

	PAGE
MEMORY IN ANOTHER WORLD (Luke xvi. 25) . . .	107
GOD'S SLAVES (Luke xvii. 9-10) . . . . .	119
WHERE ARE THE NINE? (Luke xvii. 11-19) . . .	127
THREE KINDS OF PRAYING (Luke xviii. 1-14) . . .	131
ENTERING THE KINGDOM (Luke xviii. 15-30) . . .	138
THE MAN THAT STOPPED JESUS (Luke xviii. 40-41) . . .	144
MELTED BY KINDNESS (Luke xix. 5) . . . . .	151
THE TRADING SERVANTS (Luke xix. 16, 18) . . .	163
THE REWARDS OF THE TRADING SERVANTS (Luke xix. 17, 19) . . .	173
A NEW KIND OF KING (Luke xix. 37-48) . . . . .	183
TENANTS WHO WANTED TO BE OWNERS (Luke xx. 9-19) . . .	190
WHOSE IMAGE AND SUPERScription? (Luke xx. 24) . . .	195
WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE? (Luke xxi. 20-36) . . .	204
THE LORD'S SUPPER (Luke xxii. 7-20) . . . . .	211
PARTING PROMISES AND WARNINGS (Luke xxii. 24-37) . . .	217



# CONTENTS

vii

	PAGE
CHRIST'S IDEAL OF A MONARCH (Luke xxii. 25, 26)	224
THE LONELY CHRIST (Luke xxii. 28)	231
A GREAT FALL AND A GREAT RECOVERY (Luke xxii. 32)	240
GETHSEMANE (Luke xxii. 39-53)	247
THE CROSS THE VICTORY AND DEFEAT OF DARKNESS (Luke xxii. 53)	254 ✓
IN THE HIGH PRIEST'S PALACE (Luke xxii. 54-71)	264
CHRIST'S LOOK (Luke xxii. 61)	270
'THE RULERS TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER' (Luke xxiii. 1-12)	279
A SOUL'S TRAGEDY (Luke xxiii. 9)	286 ✓
JESUS AND PILATE (Luke xxiii. 13-26)	296 ✓
WORDS FROM THE CROSS (Luke xxiii. 33-46)	301
THE DYING THIEF (Luke xxiii. 42)	306
THE FIRST EASTER SUNRISE (Luke xxiv. 1-12)	318
THE LIVING DEAD (Luke xxiv. 5-6)	323
THE RISEN LORD'S SELF-REVELATION TO WAVERING DISCIPLES (Luke xxiv. 13-32)	335

545733

	PAGE
DETAINING CHRIST (Luke xxiv. 28, 29) . . .	342
THE MEAL AT EMMAUS (Luke xxiv. 30, 31) . . .	348
PETER ALONE WITH JESUS (Luke xxiv. 34) . . .	362
THE TRIUMPHANT END (Luke xxiv. 36-53) . . .	372
CHRIST'S WITNESSES (Luke xxiv. 48, 49) . . .	379
THE ASCENSION (Luke xxiv. 50, 51; Acts i. 9) . . .	388



## TRUE SABBATH OBSERVANCE

'And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. 12. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. 13. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. 14. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. 15. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall and lead him away to watering? 16. And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? 17. And when He had said these things, all His adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.'—LUKE xiii. 10-17.

THIS miracle was wrought, unasked, on a woman, in a synagogue, and by all these characteristics was specially interesting to Luke. He alone records it. The narrative falls into two parts—the miracle, and the covert attack of the ruler of the synagogue, with our Lord's defence.

What better place than the synagogue could there be for a miracle of mercy? The service of man is best built on the service of God, and the service of God is as truly accomplished in deeds of human kindness done for His sake as in oral worship. The religious basis of beneficence and the beneficent manifestation of religion are commonplaces of Christian practice and thought from the beginning, and are both set forth in our Lord's life. He did not substitute doing good to men for worshipping God, as a once much-belauded but now all-but-forgotten anti-Christian writer has done; but He showed us both in their true relations.

We have Christ's authority for regarding the woman's infirmity as the result of demoniacal possession, but the case presents some singular features. There seems to have been no other consequence than her incapacity to stand straight. Apparently the evil power had not touched her moral nature, for she had somehow managed to drag herself to the synagogue to pray; she 'glorified God' for her cure, and Christ called her 'a daughter of Abraham,' which surely means more than simply that she was a Jewess. It would seem to have been a case of physical infirmity only, and perhaps rather of evil inflicted eighteen years before than of continuous demoniacal possession.

But be that as it may, there is surely no getting over our Lord's express testimony here, that purely physical ills, not distinguishable from natural infirmity, were then, in some instances, the work of a malignant, personal power. Jesus knew the duration of the woman's 'bond' and the cause of it, by the same supernatural knowledge. That sad, bowed figure, with eyes fixed on the ground, and unable to look into His face, which yet had crawled to the synagogue, may teach us lessons of patience and of devout submission. She might have found good excuses for staying at home, but she, no doubt, found solace in worship; and she would not have so swiftly 'glorified God' for her cure, if she had not often sought Him in her infirmity. They who wait on Him often find more than they expect in His house.

Note the flow of Christ's unasked sympathy and help. We have already seen several instances of the same thing in this Gospel. The sight of misery ever set the chords of that gentle, unselfish heart vibrating, as surely as the wind draws music from the Æolian



harp strings. So it should be with us, and so would it be, if we had in us 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ' making us 'free from the law of' self. But His spontaneous sympathy is not merely the perfection of manhood; it is the revelation of God. Unasked, the divine love pours itself on men, and gives all that it can give to those who do not seek, that they may be drawn to seek the better gifts which cannot be given unasked. God 'tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men,' in giving His greatest gift. No prayers besought Heaven for a Saviour. God's love is its own motive, and wells up by its inherent diffusiveness. Before we call, He answers.

Note the manner of the cure. It is twofold—a word and a touch. The former is remarkable, as not being, like most of the cures of demoniacs, a command to the evil spirit to go forth, but an assurance to the sufferer, fitted to inspire her with hope, and to encourage her to throw off the alien tyranny. The touch was the symbol to her of communicated power—not that Jesus needed a vehicle for His delivering strength, but that the poor victim, crushed in spirit, needed the outward sign to help her in realising the new energy that ran in her veins, and strengthened her muscles. Unquestionably the cure was miraculous, and its cause was Christ's will.

But apparently the manner of cure gave more place to the faith of the sufferer, and to the effort which her faith in Christ's word and touch heartened her to put forth, than we find in other miracles. She 'could in no wise lift herself up,' not because of any malformation or deficiency in physical power, but because that malign influence laid a heavy hand on her will and body, and crushed her down. Only supernatural power

could deliver from supernatural evil, but that power wrought through as well as on her; and when she believed that she was loosed from her infirmity, and had received strength from Jesus, she was loosed.

This makes the miracle no less, but it makes it a mirror in which the manner of our deliverance from a worse dominion of Satan is shadowed. Christ is come to loose us all from the yoke of bondage, which bows our faces to the ground, and makes us unfit to look up. He only can loose us, and His way of doing it is to assure us that we are free, and to give us power to fling off the oppression in the strength of faith in Him.

Note the immediate cure and its immediate result. The 'back bowed down always' for eighteen weary years is not too stiff to be made straight at once. The Christ-given power obliterates all traces of the past evil. Where He is the physician, there is no period of gradual convalescence, but 'the thing is done suddenly'; and, though in the spiritual realm, there still hang about pardoned men remains of forgiven sin, they are 'sanctified' in their inward selves, and have but to see to it that they work out in character and conduct that 'righteousness and holiness of truth' which they have received in the new nature given them through faith.

How rapturous was the gratitude from the woman's lips, which broke in upon the formal, proper, and heartless worship of the synagogue! The immediate hallowing of her joy into praise surely augurs a previously devout heart. Thanksgiving generally comes thus swiftly after mercies, when prayer has habitually preceded them. The sweetest sweetness of all our blessings is only enjoyed when we glorify God for them.



Incense must be kindled, to be fragrant, and our joys must be fired by devotion, to give their rarest perfume.

The cavils of the ruler and Christ's defence are the second part of this incident. Note the blindness and cold-heartedness born of religious formalism. This synagogue official has no eye for the beauty of Christ's pity, no heart to rejoice in the woman's deliverance, no ear for the music of her praise. All that he sees is a violation of ecclesiastical order. That is the sin of sins in his eyes. He admits the reality of Christ's healing power, but that does not lead him to recognition of His mission. What a strange state of mind it was that acknowledged the miracle, and then took offence at its being done on the Sabbath!

Note, too, his disingenuous cowardice in attacking the people when he meant Christ. He blunders, too, in his scolding; for nobody had come to be healed. They had come to worship; and even if they had come for healing, the coming was no breach of Sabbath regulations, whatever the healing might be. There are plenty of people like this stickler for propriety and form, and if you want to find men blind as bats to the manifest tokens of a divine hand, and hard as millstones towards misery, and utterly incapable of glowing with enthusiasm or of recognising it, you will find them among ecclesiastical martinets, who are all for having 'things done decently and in order,' and would rather that a hundred poor sufferers should continue bowed down than that one of their regulations should be broken in lifting them up. The more men are filled with the spirit of worship, the less importance will they attach to the pedantic adherence to its forms, which is the most part of some people's religion.

Mark the severity, which is loving severity, of

Christ's answer. He speaks to all who shared the ruler's thoughts, of whom there were several present (v. 17, 'adversaries'). Piercing words which disclose hidden and probably unconscious sins, are quite in place on the lips into which grace was poured. Well for those who let Him tell them their faults now, and do not wait for the light of judgment to show themselves to themselves for the first time.

Wherein lay these men's hypocrisy? They were pretending zeal for the Sabbath, while they were really moved by anger at the miracle, which would have been equally unwelcome on any day of the week. They were pretending that their zeal for the Sabbath was the result of their zeal for God, while it was only zeal for their Rabbinical niceties, and had no religious element in it at all. They wished to make the Sabbath law tight enough to restrain Jesus from miracles, while they made it loose enough to allow them to look after their own interests.

Men may be unconscious hypocrites, and these are the most hopeless. We are all in danger of fancying that we are displaying our zeal for the Lord, when we are only contending for our own additions to, or interpretations of, His will. There is no religion necessarily implied in enforcing forms of belief or conduct.

Our Lord's defence is, first of all, a conclusive *argumentum ad hominem*, which shuts the mouths of the objectors; but it is much more. The Talmud has minute rules for leading out animals on the Sabbath: An ass may go out with his pack saddle if it was tied on before the Sabbath, but not with a bell or a yoke; a camel may go out with a halter, but not with a rag tied to his tail; a string of camels may be led if the driver takes all the halters in his hand, and does not

twist them, but they must not be tied to one another—and so on for pages. If, then, these sticklers for rigid observance of the Sabbath admitted that a beast's thirst was reason enough for work to relieve it, it did not lie in their mouths to find fault with the relief of a far greater human need.

But the words hold a wider truth, applicable to our conduct. The relief of human sorrow is always in season. It is a sacred duty which hallows any hour. 'Is not this the fast [and the feast too] that I have chosen . . . to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?' The spirit of the words is to put the exercise of beneficence high above the formalities of worship.

Note, too, the implied assertion of the dignity of humanity, the pitying tone of the 'lo, these eighteen years,' the sympathy of the Lord with the poor woman, and the implication of the terrible tragedy of Satan's bondage. If we have His Spirit in us, and look at the solemn facts of life as He did, all these pathetic considerations will be present to our minds as we behold the misery of men, and, moved by the thoughts of their lofty place in God's scheme of things, of their long and dreary bondage, of the evil power that holds them fast, and of what they may become, even sons and daughters of the Highest, we shall be fired with the same longing to help which filled Christ's heart, and shall count that hour consecrated, and not profaned, in which we are able to bring liberty to the captives, and an upward gaze of hope to them that have been bowed down.



## THE STRAIT GATE

'And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23. Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And He said unto them, 24. Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. 25. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: 26. Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. 27. But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity. 28. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. 29. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. 30. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.'—LUKE xiii. 22-30.

'ARE there few that be saved?' The questioner's temper and motives may be inferred from the tone of Christ's answer, which turns attention from a mere piece of speculative curiosity to the grave personal aspect of the condition of 'salvation,' and the possibility of missing it. Whether few or many went in, there would be many left out, and among these some of the listeners. Jesus speaks to 'them,' the multitude, not to the questioner. The men who approach solemn subjects lightly, and use them as material for raising profitless questions for the sake of getting religious teachers in a corner, exist still, and are best answered after Christ's manner.

Of course, the speaker meant by being 'saved' participation in Messiah's kingdom, regarded in the carnal Jewish fashion; and our Lord's reply is primarily directed to setting forth the condition of entrance into that kingdom, as the Jew expected it to be manifested on earth. But behind that immediate reference lies a solemn unveiling of the conditions of salvation in

its deepest meaning, and of the danger of exclusion from it.

I. We note, first, the all-important exhortation with which Christ seeks to sober a frivolous curiosity. In its primary application, the 'strait gate' may be taken to be the lowliness of the Messiah, and the consequent sharp contrast of His kingdom with Jewish high-flown and fleshly hopes. The passage to the promised royalty was not through a great portal worthy of a palace, but by a narrow, low-browed wicket, through which it took a man trouble to squeeze. For us, the narrow gate is the self-abandonment and self-accusation which are indispensable for entrance into salvation.

'The door of faith' is a narrow one; for it lets no self-righteousness, no worldly glories, no dignities, through. Like the Emperor at Canossa, we are kept outside till we strip ourselves of crowns and royal robes, and stand clothed only in the hair-shirt of penitence. Like Milton's rebel angels entering their council chamber, we must make ourselves small to get in. We must creep on our knees, so low is the vault; we must leave everything outside, so narrow is it. We must go in one by one, as in the turnstiles at a place of entertainment. The door opens into a palace, but it is too strait for any one who trusts to himself.

There must be effort in order to enter by it. For everything in our old self-confident, self-centred nature is up in arms against the conditions of entrance. We are not saved by effort, but we shall not believe without effort. The main struggle of our whole lives should be to cultivate self-humbling trust in Jesus Christ, and to 'fight the good fight of faith.'

II. We note the reason for the exhortation. It is briefly given in verse 24 (last clause), and both parts of

the reason there are expanded in the following verses. Effort is needed for entrance, because many are shut out. The questioner would be no better for knowing whether few would enter, but he and all need to burn in on their minds that many will *not*.

Very solemnly significant is the difference between *striving* and *seeking*. It is like the difference between wishing and willing. There may be a seeking which has no real earnestness in it, and is not sufficiently determined, to do what is needful in order to find. Plenty of people would like to possess earthly good, but cannot brace themselves to needful work and sacrifice. Plenty would like to 'go to heaven,' as they understand the phrase, but cannot screw themselves to the surrender of self and the world. Vagrant, half-hearted seeking, such as one sees many examples of, will never win anything, either in this world or in the other. We must strive, and not only seek.

That is true, even if we do not look beyond time; but Jesus carries our awed vision onwards to the end of the days, in the expansion of his warning, which follows in verses 25-27. No doubt, the words had a meaning for His hearers in reference to the Messianic kingdom, and a fulfilment in the rejection of the nation. But we have to discern in them a further and future significance.

Observe that the scene suggested differs from the similar parable of the virgins waiting for their Lord, in that it does not describe a wedding feast. Here it is a householder already in his house, and, at the close of the day, locking up for the night. Some of his servants have not returned in time, have not come in through the narrow gate, which is now not only narrow, but closed by the master's own hand. The



translation of that is that, by a decisive act of Christ's in the future, the time for entrance will be ended. As in reference to each stage of life, specific opportunities are given in it for securing specific results, and these can never be recovered if the stage is past; so mortal life, as a whole, is the time for entrance, and if it is not used for that purpose, entrance is impossible. If the youth will not learn, the man will be ignorant. If the sluggard will not plough because the weather is cold, he will 'beg in harvest.' If we do not strive to enter at the gate, it is vain to seek entrance when the Master's own hand has barred it.

The language of our Lord here seems to shut us up to the conclusion that life is the time in which we can gain our entrance. It is no kindness to suggest that perhaps He does not shut the door quite fast. We know, at all events, that it is wide open now.

The words put into the mouths of the excluded sufficiently define their characters, and the reasons why they sought in vain. Why did they want to be in? Because they wished to get out of the cold darkness into the warm light of the bountiful house. But they neither knew the conditions of entrance nor had they any desire after the true blessings within. Their deficiencies are plainly marked in their pleas for admission. At first, they simply ask for entrance, as if thinking that to wish was to have. Then, when the Householder says that He knows nothing about them, and cannot let strangers in, they plead as their qualification that they had eaten and drunk in His presence, and that He had taught in their streets. In these words, the relations of Christ's contemporaries are described, and their immediate application to them is plain.

Outward connection with Jesus gave no claim to

share in His kingdom. We have to learn the lesson which we who live amidst a widely diffused, professing Christianity sadly need. No outward connection with Christ, in Christian ordinances or profession, will avail to establish a claim to have the door opened for us. A man may be a most respectable and respected church-member, and have listened to Christian teaching all his days, and have in life a vague wish to be 'saved,' and yet be hopelessly unfit to enter, and therefore irremediably shut out.

The Householder's answer, in its severity and calmness, indicates the inflexible impossibility of opening to such seekers. It puts stress on two things—the absence of any vital relationship between Him and them, and their moral character. He knows nothing about them, and not to be known by the Master of the house is necessarily to be shut out from His household. They are known of the Shepherd who know Him and hear His voice. They who are not must stay in the desert. Such mutual knowledge is the basis of all righteousness, and righteousness is the essential condition of entrance.

These seekers are represented as still working iniquity. They had not changed their moral nature. They wished to enter heaven, but they still loved evil. How could they come in, even if the door had been open? Let us learn that, while faith is the door, without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The worker of iniquity has only an outward relation to Jesus. Inwardly he is separated from Him, and, at last, the outward relation will be adjusted to the inward, and departure from Him will be inevitable, and that is ruin.

III. Boldly and searchingly personal as the preceding

words had been, the final turn of Christ's answer must have had a still sharper and more distasteful edge. He had struck a blow at Jewish trust in outward connection with Messiah as ensuring participation in His kingdom. He now says that the Gentiles shall fill the vacant places. Many Jews will be unable to enter, for all their seeking, but still there will be many saved; for troops of hated Gentiles shall come from every corner of the earth, and the sight of them sitting beside the fathers of the nation, while Israel after the flesh is shut out, will move the excluded to weeping—the token of sorrow, which yet has in it no softening nor entrance-securing effect, because it passes into 'gnashing of teeth,' the sign of anger. Such sorrow worketh death.

Such fierce hatred, joined with stiff-necked obstinacy, has characterised the Jew ever since Jerusalem fell. 'If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.' Israel was first, and has become last. The same causes which sent it from the van to the rear have worked like effects in 'Christendom,' as witness Asia Minor and the mosques into which Christian churches have been turned.

These causes will produce like effects wherever they become dominant. Any church and any individual Christian who trusts in outward connection with Christ, and works iniquity, will sooner or later fall into the rear, and if repentance and faith do not lead it or him through the strait gate, will be among those 'last' who are so far behind that they are shut out altogether. Let us 'be not high-minded, but fear.'



## CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO HEROD

'And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. 33. Nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.'—LUKE xiii. 32, 33.

EVEN a lamb might be suspicious if wolves were to show themselves tenderly careful of its safety. Pharisees taking Christ's life under their protection were enough to suggest a trick. These men came to Christ desirous of posing as counterworking Herod's intention to slay Him. Our Lord's answer, bidding them go and tell Herod what He immediately communicates to them, shows that He regarded them as in a plot with that crafty, capricious kinglet. And evidently there was an understanding between them. For some reason or other, best known to his own changeable and whimsical nature, the man who at one moment was eagerly desirous to see Jesus, was at the next as eagerly desirous to get Him out of his territories; just as he admired and murdered John the Baptist. The Pharisees, on the other hand, desired to draw Him to Jerusalem, where they would have Him in their power more completely than in the northern district. If they had spoken all their minds they would have said, 'Go hence, or else we cannot kill Thee.' So Christ answers the hidden schemes, and not the apparent solicitude, in the words that I have taken for my text. They unmask the plot, they calmly put aside the threats of danger. They declare that His course was influenced by far other considerations. They show that He clearly saw what it was towards which He was journeying. And then, with sad irony, they declare that it

was, as it were, contrary to prophetic decorum and established usage that a prophet should be slain anywhere but in the streets of the bloody and sacred city.

There are many deep things in the words, which I cannot touch in the course of a single sermon; but I wish now, at all events, to skim their surface, and try to gather some of their obvious lessons.

I. First, then, note Christ's clear vision of His death.

There is some difficulty about the chronology of this period with which I need not trouble you. It is enough to note that the incident with which we are concerned occurred during that last journey of our Lord's towards Jerusalem and Calvary, which occupies so much of this Gospel of Luke. At what point in that fateful journey it occurred may be left undetermined. Nor need I enter upon the question as to whether the specification of time in our text, 'to-day, and to-morrow, and the third day,' is intended to be taken literally, as some commentators suppose, in which case it would be brought extremely near the goal of the journey; or whether, as seems more probable from the context, it is to be taken as a kind of proverbial expression for a definite but short period. That the latter is the proper interpretation seems to be largely confirmed by the fact that there is a slight variation in the application of the designation of time in the two verses of our text, 'the third day' in the former verse being regarded as the period of the perfecting, whilst in the latter verse it is regarded as part of the period of the progress towards the perfecting. Such variation in the application is more congruous with the idea that we have here to deal with a kind of proverbial expression

for a limited and short period. Our Lord is saying in effect, 'My time is not to be settled by Herod. It is definite, and it is short. It is needless for him to trouble himself; for in three days it will be all over. It is useless for him to trouble himself, or for you Pharisees to plot, for until the appointed days are past it will not be over, whatever you and he may do.' The course He had yet to run was plain before Him in this last journey, every step of which was taken with the Cross full in view.

Now the worst part of death is the anticipation of death; and it became Him who bore death for every man to drink to its dregs that cup of trembling which the fear of it puts to all human lips. We rightly regard it as a cruel aggravation of a criminal's doom if he is carried along a level, straight road with his gibbet in view at the end of the march. But so it was that Jesus Christ travelled through life.

My text comes at a comparatively late period of His history. A few months or weeks at the most intervened between Him and the end. But the consciousness which is here so calmly expressed was not of recent origin. We know that from the period of His transfiguration He began to give His death a very prominent place in His teaching, but it had been present with Him long before He thus laid emphasis upon it in His communications with His disciples. For, if we accept John's Gospel as historical, we shall have to throw back His first public references to the end to the very beginning of His career. The cleansing of the Temple, at the very outset of His course, was vindicated by Him by the profound words, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' During the same early visit to the capital city He said to Nicodemus, 'As



Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.' So Christ's career was not like that of many a man who has begun, full of sanguine hope as a possible reformer and benefactor of his fellows, and by slow degrees has awakened to the consciousness that reformers and benefactors need to be martyrs ere their ideals can be realised. There was no disillusioning in Christ's experience. From the commencement He knew that He came, not only to minister, but also 'to give His life a ransom for the many.' And it was *not* a mother's eye, as a reverent modern painter has profoundly, and yet erroneously, shown us in his great work in our own city gallery—it was not a mother's eye that first saw the shadow of the Cross fall on her unconscious Son, but it was Himself that all through His earthly pilgrimage knew Himself to be the Lamb appointed for the sacrifice. This Isaac toiled up the hill, bearing the wood and the knife, and knew where and who was the Offering.

Brethren, I do not think that we sufficiently realise the importance of that element in our conceptions of the life of Jesus Christ. What a pathos it gives to it all! What a beauty it gives to His gentleness, to His ready interest in others, to His sympathy for all sorrow, and tenderness with all sin! How wonderfully it deepens the significance, the loveliness, and the pathos of the fact that 'the Son of Man came eating and drinking,' remembering everybody but Himself, and ready to enter into all the cares and the sorrows of other hearts, if we think that all the while there stood, grim and certain, before Him that Calvary with its Cross! Thus, through all His path, He knew to what He was journeying.

II. Then again, secondly, let me ask you to note here

our Lord's own estimate of the place which His death holds in relation to His whole work.

Notice that remarkable variation in the expression in our text. 'The third day I shall be *perfected*. . . . It cannot be that a prophet *perish* out of Jerusalem.' Then, somehow or other, the 'perishing' is 'perfecting.' There may be a doubt as to the precise rendering of the word translated by 'perfecting'; but it seems to me that the only meaning congruous with the context is that which is suggested by the translation of our Authorised Version, and that our Lord does not mean to say 'on the third day I shall complete My work of casting out devils and curing diseases,' but that He masses the whole of His work into two great portions—the one of which includes all His works and ministrations of miracles and of mercy; and the other of which contains one unique and transcendent fact, which outweighs and towers above all these others, and is the perfecting of His work, and the culmination of His obedience, service, and sacrifice.

Now, of course, I need not remind you that the 'perfecting' thus spoken of is not a perfecting of moral character or of individual nature, but that it is the same perfecting which the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks about when it says, 'Being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation to all them which obey Him.' That is to say, it is His perfecting in regard to office, function, work for the world, and not the completion or elevation of His individual character. And this 'perfecting' is effected in His 'perishing.'

Now I want to know in what conceivable sense the death of Jesus Christ can be the culmination and crown of His work, without which it would be a torso, an

incomplete fragment, a partial fulfilment of the Father's design, and of His own mission, unless it be that that death was, as I take it the New Testament with one voice in all its parts declares it to be, a sacrifice for the sins of the world. I know of no construing of the fact of the death on the Cross which can do justice to the plain words of my text, except the old-fashioned belief that therein He made atonement for sin, and thereby, as the Lamb of God, bore away the sins of the world.

Other great lives may be crowned by fair deaths, which henceforward become seals of faithful witness, and appeals to the sentiments of the heart, but there is no sense that I know of in which from Christ's death there can flow a mightier energy than from such a life, unless in the sense that the death is a sacrifice.

Now I know there has been harm done by the very desire to exalt Christ's great sacrifice on the Cross; when it has been so separated from His life as that the life has not been regarded as a sacrifice, nor the death as obedience. Rather the sacrificial element runs through His whole career, and began when He became flesh and tabernacled amongst us; but yet as being the apex of it all, without which it were all-imperfect, and in a special sense redeeming men from the power of death, that Cross is set forth by His own word. For Him to 'perish' was to 'be perfected.' As the ancient prophet long before had said, 'When His soul shall make an offering for sin,' then, paradoxical as it may seem, the dead Man shall 'see,' and 'shall see His seed.' Or, as He Himself said, 'If a corn of wheat fall into the ground it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.'

I do not want to insist upon any theories of Atone-



ment. I do want to insist that Christ's own estimate of the significance and purpose and issue of His death shall not be slurred over, but that, recognising that He Himself regarded it as the perfecting of His work, we ask ourselves very earnestly how such a conception can be explained if we strike out of our Christianity the thought of the sacrifice for the sins of the world. Unless we take Paul's gospel, 'How that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' I for one do not believe that we shall ever get Paul's results, 'Old things are passed away; all things are become new.' If you strike the Cross off the dome of the temple, the fires on its altars will soon go out. A Christianity which has to say much about the life of Jesus, and knows not what to say about the death of Christ, will be a Christianity that will neither have much constraining power in our lives, nor be able to breathe a benediction of peace over our deaths. If we desire to be perfected in character, we must have faith in that sacrificial death which was the perfecting of Christ's work.

III. And so, lastly, notice our Lord's resolved surrender to the discerned Cross.

There is much in this aspect in the words of my text which I cannot touch upon now; but two or three points I may briefly notice.

Note then, I was going to say, the superb heroism of His calm indifference to threats and dangers. He will go hence, and relieve the tyrant's dominions of His presence; but He is careful to make it plain that His going has no connection with the futile threatenings by which they have sought to terrify Him. 'Nevertheless'—although I do not care at all for them or for him—'nevertheless I must journey to-day and to-morrow! But that is not because I fear death, but

because I am going to My death; for the prophet must die in Jerusalem.' We are so accustomed to think of the 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' that we forget the 'strong Son of God.' If we were talking about a man merely, we should point to this calm, dignified answer as being an instance of heroism, but we do not feel that that word fits Him. There are too many vulgar associations connected with it, to be adapted to the gentleness of His fixed purpose that blenched not, nor faltered, whatsoever came in the way.

Light is far more powerful than lightning. Meekness may be, and in Him was, wedded to a will like a bar of iron, and a heart that knew not how to fear. If ever there was an iron hand in a velvet glove it was the hand of Christ. And although the perspective of virtues which Christianity has introduced, and which Christ exhibited in His life, gives prominence to the meek and the gentle, let us not forget that it also enjoins the cultivation of the 'wrestling thews that throw the world.' 'Quit you like men; be strong; let all your deeds be done in charity.'

Then note, too, the solemn law that ruled His life. 'I *must* walk.' That is a very familiar expression upon His lips. From that early day when He said, 'Wist ye not that I *must* be about My Father's business,' to that last when He said, 'The Son of Man *must* be lifted up,' there crops out, ever and anon, in the occasional glimpses that He allows us to have of His inmost spirit, this reference of all His actions to a necessity that was laid upon Him, and to which He ever consciously conformed. That necessity determined what He calls so frequently 'My time; My hour'; and influenced the trifles, as they are called, as well as the great crises, of His career. It was the Father's will

which made the Son's *must*. Hence His unbroken communion and untroubled calm.

If we want to live near God, and if we want to have lives of peace amidst convulsions, we, too, must yield ourselves to that all encompassing sovereign necessity, which, like the great laws of the universe, shapes the planets and the suns in their courses and their stations; and holds together two grains of dust, or two motes that dance in the sunshine. To gravitation there is nothing great and nothing small. God's *must* covers all the ground of our lives, and should ever be responded to by our 'I will.'

And that brings me to the last point, and that is, our Lord's glad acceptance of the necessity and surrender of the Cross. What was it that made Him willing to take that 'must' as the law of His life? First, a Son's obedience; second, a Brother's love. There was no point in Christ's career, from the moment when in the desert He put away the temptation to win the kingdoms of the world by other than the God-appointed means, down to the last moment when on His dying ears there fell another form of the same temptation in the taunt, 'Let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe on Him'; when He could not, if He had chosen to abandon His mission, have saved Himself. No compulsion, no outward hand impelling Him, drove Him along that course which ended on Calvary; but only that He would save others, and therefore 'Himself He cannot save.'

True, there were natural human shrinkings, just as the weight and impetus of some tremendous billow buffeting the bows of the ship makes it quiver; but this never affected the firm hand on the rudder, and never deflected the vessel from its course. Christ's



'soul was troubled,' but His will was fixed, and it was fixed by His love to us. Like one of the men who in after ages died for His dear sake, He may be conceived as refusing to be bound to the stake by any bands, willing to stand there and be destroyed because He wills. Nothing fastened Him to the Cross but His resolve to save the world, in which world was included each of us sitting listening and standing speaking, now. Oh, brethren! shall not we, moved by such love, with like cheerfulness of surrender, give ourselves to Him who gave Himself for us?

## THE LESSONS OF A FEAST

'And it came to pass, as He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, that they watched Him. 2. And, behold, there was a certain man before Him which had the dropsy. 3. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? 4. And they held their peace. And He took him, and healed him, and let him go; 5. And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day? 6. And they could not answer Him again to these things. 7. And He put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when He marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, 8. When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; 9. And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. 10. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. 11. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. 12. Then said He also to him that bade Him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. 13. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: 14. And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.'—LUKE xiv, 1-14.

JESUS never refused an invitation, whether the inviter were a Pharisee or a publican, a friend or a foe. He never mistook the disposition of His host. He accepted 'greetings where no kindness is,' and on this occasion

there was none. The entertainer was a spy, and the feast was a trap. What a contrast between the malicious watchers at the table, ready to note and to interpret in the worst sense every action of His, and Him loving and wishing to bless even them! The chill atmosphere of suspicion did not freeze the flow of His gentle beneficence and wise teaching. His meek goodness remained itself in the face of hostile observers. The miracle and the two parables are aimed straight at their errors.

I. How came the dropsical man there? Possibly he had simply strayed in to look on at the feast, as the freedom of manners then would permit him to do. The absence of any hint that he came hoping for a cure, and of any trace of faith on his part, or of speech to him on Christ's, joined with his immediate dismissal after his cure, rather favours the supposition that he had been put as the bait of the trap, on the calculation that the sight of him would move Jesus to heal him. The setters of the snare were 'watching' whether it would work, and Jesus 'answered' their thoughts, which were, doubtless, visible in their eyes. His answer has three stages—a question which is an assertion, the cure, and another affirming question. All three are met with sulky silence, which speaks more than words would have done. The first question takes the 'lawyers' on their own ground, and in effect asserts that to heal did not break the Sabbath. Jesus challenges denial of the lawfulness of it, and the silence of the Pharisees confesses that they dare not deny. 'The bare fact of healing is not prohibited,' they might have said, 'but the acts necessary for healing are.' But no acts were necessary for this Healer's power to operate. The outgoing of His will had power.

Their finespun distinctions of deeds lawful and unlawful were spiders' webs, and His act of mercy flew high above the webs, like some fair winged creature glancing in the sunshine, while the spider sits in his crevice balked. The broad principle involved in Jesus' first question is that no Sabbath law, no so-called religious restriction, can ever forbid helping the miserable. The repose of the Sabbath is deepened, not disturbed, by activity for man's good.

The cure is told without detail, probably because there were no details to tell. There is no sign of request or of faith on the sufferer's part; there seems to have been no outward act on Christ's beyond 'taking' him, which appears simply to mean that He called him nearer, and then, by a simple exercise of His will, healed him. There is no trace of thanks or of wonder in the heart of the sufferer, who probably never had anything more to do with his benefactor. Silently he comes on the stage, silently he gets his blessing, silently he disappears. A strange, sad instance of how possible it is to have a momentary connection with Jesus, and even to receive gifts from His hand, and yet to have no real, permanent relation to Him!

The second question turns from the legal to a broader consideration. The spontaneous workings of the heart are not to be dammed back by ceremonial laws. Need calls for immediate succour. You do not wait for the Sabbath's sun to set when your ox or your ass is in a pit. (The reading 'son' instead of 'ox,' as in the Revised Version margin, is incongruous.) Jesus is appealing to the instinctive wish to give immediate help even to a beast in trouble, and implies that much more should the same instinct be allowed immediate play when its object is a man. The listeners were self-condemned,



and their obstinate silence proves that the arrow had struck deep.

II. The cure seems to have taken place before the guests seated themselves. Then came a scramble for the most honourable places, on which He looked with perhaps a sad smile. Again the silence of the guests is noticeable, as well as the calm assumption of authority by Jesus, even among such hostile company. Where He comes a guest, He becomes teacher, and by divine right He rebukes. The lesson is given, says Luke, as 'a parable,' by which we are to understand that our Lord is not here giving, as might appear if His words are superficially interpreted, a mere lesson of proper behaviour at a feast, but is taking that behaviour as an illustration of a far deeper thing. Possibly some too ambitious guest had contrived to seat himself in the place of honour, and had had to turn out, and, with an embarrassed mien, had to go down to the very lowest place, as all the intermediate ones were full. His eagerness to be at the top had ended in his being at the bottom. That is a 'parable,' says Jesus, an illustration in the region of daily life, of large truths in morals and religion. It is a poor motive for outward humility and self-abasement that it may end in higher honour. And if Jesus was here only giving directions for conduct in regard to men, He was inculcating a doubtful kind of morality. The devil's

'darling sin  
Is the pride that apes humility.'

Jesus was not recommending that, but what is crafty ambition, veiling itself in lowliness for its own purposes, when exercised in outward life, becomes a noble, pure, and altogether worthy, thing in the spiritual

sphere. For to desire to be exalted in the kingdom is wholly right, and to humble one's self with a direct view to that exaltation is to tread the path which He has hallowed by His own footsteps. The true aim for ambition is the honour that cometh from God only, and the true path to it is through the valley; for 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.'

III. Unbroken silence still prevailed among the guests, but again Jesus speaks as teacher, and now to the host. A guest does not usually make remarks on the composition of the company. Jesus could make no 'recompense' to His entertainer, but to give him this counsel. Again, He inculcated a wide general lesson under the guise of a particular exhortation appropriate to the occasion. Probably the bulk of the guests were well-to-do people of the host's own social rank, and, as probably, there were onlookers of a lower degree, like the dropsical man. The prohibition is not directed against the natural custom of inviting one's associates and equals, but against inviting them only, and against doing so with a sharp eye to the advantages to be derived from it. That weary round of giving a self-regarding hospitality, and then getting a return dinner or evening entertainment from each guest, which makes up so much of the social life among us, is a pitiful affair, hollow and selfish. What would Jesus say—what does Jesus say—about it all? The sacred name of hospitality is profaned, and the very springs of it dried up by much of our social customs, and the most literal application of our Lord's teaching here is sorely needed.

But the words are meant as a 'parable,' and are to be widened out to include all sorts of kindnesses and helps given in the sacred name of charity, to those

whose only claim is their need. 'They cannot recompense thee'—so much the better, for, if an eye to their doing so could have influenced thee, thy beneficence would have lost its grace and savour, and would have been simple selfishness, and, as such, incapable of future reward. It is only love that is lavished on those who can make no return which is so free from the taint of secret regard to self that it is fit to be recognised as love in the revealing light of that great day, and therefore is fit to be 'recompensed in the resurrection of the just.'

### EXCUSES NOT REASONS

'They all with one consent began to make excuse. —LUKE xiv. 18.

JESUS CHRIST was at a feast in a Pharisee's house. It was a strange place for Him—and His words at the table were also strange. For He first rebuked the guests, and then the host; telling the former to take the lower rooms, and bidding the latter widen his hospitality to those that could not recompense him. It was a sharp saying; and one of the other guests turned the edge of it by laying hold of our Lord's final words: 'Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just,' and saying, no doubt in a pious tone and with a devout shake of the head, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.' It was a very proper thing to say, but there was a ring of conventional, commonplace piety about it, which struck unpleasantly on Christ's ear. He answers the speaker with that strange story of the great feast that nobody would come to, as if He had said, 'You pretend to think that it is a blessed thing to eat bread in the Kingdom of God.

Why! You will not eat bread when it is offered to you.'

I dare say you all know enough of the parable to make it unnecessary for me to go over it. A great feast is prepared; invitations, more or less general, are sent out at first, everything is ready; and, behold, there is a table, and nobody to sit at it. A strange experience for a hospitable man! And so he sends his servants to beat up the unwilling guests, and, one after another, with more or less politeness, refuses to come.

I need not follow the story further. In the latter part of the parable our Lord shadows the transference of the blessings of the Kingdom to the Gentiles, outcasts as the Jews thought them, skulking in the hedges and tramping on the highways. In the first part He foreshadows the failure of His own preaching amongst His own people. But Jews and Englishmen are very much alike. The way in which these invited guests treated the invitation to this feast is being repeated, day by day, by thousands of men round us; and by some of ourselves. 'They all, with one consent, began to make excuse.'

I. The first thing that I would desire you to notice is the strangely unanimous refusal.

The guests' conduct in the story is such as life and reality would afford no example of. No set of people, asked to a great banquet, would behave as these people in the parable do. Then, is the introduction of such an unnatural trait as this a fault in the construction of narrative? No! Rather it is a beauty, for the very point of the story is the utter unnaturalness of the conduct described, and the contrast that is presented between the way in which men regard the lower bless-



ings from which these people are represented as turning, and in which they regard the loftier blessings that are offered. Nobody would turn his back upon such a banquet if he had the chance of going to it. What, then, shall we say of those who, by platoons and regiments, turn their backs upon this higher offer? The very preposterous unnaturalness of the conduct, if the parable were a true story, points to the deep meaning that lies behind it: that in that higher region the unnatural is the universal, or all but universal.

And, indeed, it is so. One would almost venture to say that there is a kind of law according to which the more valuable a thing is the less men care to have it; or, if you like to put it into more scientific language, the attraction of an object is in the inverse ratio to its worth. Small things, transitory things, material things, everybody grasps at; and the number of graspers steadily decreases as you go up the scale in preciousness, until, when you reach the highest of all, there are the fewest that want them. Is there anything lower than good that merely gratifies the body? Is there anything that the most of men want more? Are there many things lower in the scale than money? Are there many things that pull more strongly? Is not truth better than wealth? Are there more pursuers of it than there are of the former? For one man who is eager to know, and counts his life well spent, in following knowledge

‘Like a sinking star,  
Beyond the furthest bounds of human thought,’

there are a hundred who think it rightly expended in the pursuit after the wealth that perishes. Is not

goodness higher than truth, and are not the men that are content to devote themselves to becoming wise more numerous than those that are content to devote themselves to becoming pure? And, topmost of all, is there anything to be compared with the gifts that are held out to us in that great Saviour and in His message? And is there anything that the mass of men pass by with more unanimous refusal than the offered feast which the great King of humanity has provided for His subjects? What is offered for each of us, pressed upon us, in the gift of Jesus Christ? Help, guidance, companionship, restfulness of heart, power of obedience, victory over self, control of passions, supremacy over circumstances, tranquillity deep and genuine, death abolished, Heaven opened, measureless hopes following upon perfect fruition, here and hereafter. These things are all gathered into, and their various sparkles absorbed in, the one steady light of that one great encyclopædial word—Salvation. These gifts are going begging, lying at our doors, offered to every one of us, pressed upon all on the simple condition of taking Christ for Saviour and King. And what do we do with them? ‘They all, with one consent, began to make excuse.’

One hears of barbarous people that have no use for the gold that abounds in their country, and do not think it half as valuable as glass beads. That is how men estimate the true and the trumpery treasures which Christ and the world offer. I declare it seems to me that, calmly looking at men’s nature, and their duration, and then thinking of the aims of the most of them, we should not be very far wrong if we said an epidemic of insanity sits upon the world. For surely to turn away from the gold and to hug the glass beads

is very little short of madness. 'This their way is their folly, and their posterity approve their sayings.'

And now notice that this refusal may be, and often in fact is, accompanied with lip recognition of the preciousness of the neglected things. That Pharisee who put up the pillow of his pious sentiment—a piece of cant, because he did not feel what he was saying—to deaden the cannon-ball of Christ's word, is only a pattern of a good many of us who think that to say, 'Blessed is he that eateth bread in the Kingdom of God,' with the proper unctuous roll of the voice, is pretty nearly as good as to take the bread that is offered to us. There are no more difficult people to get at than the people, of whom I am sure I have some specimens before me now, who bow their heads in assent to the word of the Gospel, and by bowing them escape its impact, and let it whistle harmlessly over. You that believe every word that I or my brethren preach, and never dream of letting it affect your conduct—if there be degrees in that lunatic asylum of the world, surely you are candidates for the highest place.

II. Now, secondly, notice the flimsy excuses.

'They all, with one consent, began.' I do not suppose that they had laid their heads together, or that our Lord intends us to suppose that there was a conspiracy and concert of refusal, but only that without any previous consultation, all had the same sentiments, and offered substantially the same answer. All the reasons that are given come to one and the same thing—viz. occupation with present interests, duties, possessions, or affections. There are differences in the excuses which are not only helps to the vividness of the narrative, but also express differences in the speakers.

One man is a shade politer than the others. He puts his refusal on the ground of necessity. He 'must,' and so he courteously prays that he may be held excused. The second one is not quite so polite; but still there is a touch of courtesy about him too. He does not pretend necessity as his friend had done, but he simply says, 'I *am* going'; and that is not quite so courteous as the former answer, but still he begs to be excused. The last man thinks that he has such an undeniable reason that he may be as brusque as he likes, and so he says, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come,' and I do not make any apologies. So with varying degrees of apparent recognition of the claims of host and feast, the ground of refusal is set forth as possessions in two cases, and as affections in the third; and these so fill the men's hearts and minds that they have no time to attend to the call that summons them to the feast.

Now it is obvious to note that the alleged necessity in one of these excuses was no necessity at all. Who made the 'must'? The man himself. The field would not run away though he waited till to-morrow. The bargain was finished, for he had bought it. There was no necessity for his going, and the next day would have done quite as well as to-day; so the 'must' was entirely in his own mind. That is to say, a great many of us mask inclinations under the garb of imperative duties and say, 'We are so pressed by necessary obligations and engagements that we really have not got any time to attend to these higher questions which you are trying to press upon us.' You remember the old story. 'I must live,' said the thief. 'I do not see the necessity,' said the judge. A man says, 'I *must* be at business to-morrow morning at



half-past eight. How can I think about religion?' Well, if you really *must*, you *can* think about it. But if you are only juggling and deceiving yourself with inclinations that pose as necessities, the sooner the veil is off the better, and you understand whereabouts you are, and what is your true position in reference to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But then let me, only in a word, remind you that the other side of the excuse is a very operative one. 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' There are some of us around whom the strong grasp of earthly affections is flung so embracingly and sweetly that we cannot, as we think, turn our loves upward and fix them upon God. Fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, parents and children, remember Christ's deep words, 'A man's foes shall be they of his own household'; and be sure that the prediction is fulfilled many a time by the hindrances of their love even more than by the opposition of their hatred.

All these excuses refer to legitimate things. It is perfectly right that the man should go and see after his field, perfectly right that the ten bullocks should be harnessed and tried, perfectly right that the sweetness of wedded love should be tasted and drunk, perfectly wrong that any of them should be put as a reason for not accepting Christ's offer. Let us take the lesson that legitimate business and lawful and pure affections may ruin a soul, and may constitute the hindrance that blocks its road to God.

Brethren, I said that these were flimsy excuses. I shall have to explain what I mean by that in a moment. As excuses they are flimsy; but as reasons which actually operate with hundreds of people, preventing them from being Christians, they are not

flimsy ; they are most solid and real. Our Lord does not mean them as exhaustive. There are a great many other grounds upon which different types of character turn away from the offered blessings of the Gospel, which do not come within view of the parable. But although not exhaustive they are widely operative. I wonder how many men and women there are listening to me now of whom it is true that they are so busy with their daily occupations that they have not time to be religious, and of how many men, and perhaps more especially women, among us at this moment it is true that their hearts are so ensnared with loves that belong to earth—beautiful and potentially sacred and elevating as these are—that they have not time to turn themselves to the one eternal Lover of their souls. Let me beseech you, dear friends—and you especially who are strangers to this place and to my voice—to do what I cannot, and would not if I could, lay these thoughts on your own hearts, and ask yourselves, ‘Is it I?’

And then before I pass from this point of my discourse, remember that the contrariety between these duties and the acceptance of the offered feast existed only in the imagination of the men that made them. There is no reason why you should not go to the feast and see after your field. There is no reason why you should not love your wife and go to the feast. God’s summons comes into collision with many wishes, but with no duties or legitimate occupations. The more a man accepts and lives upon the good that Jesus Christ spreads before him, the more fit will he be for all his work, and for all his enjoyments. The field will be better tilled, the bullocks will be better driven, the wife will be more wisely, tenderly, and sacredly loved

if in your hearts Christ is enthroned, and whatsoever you do you do as for Him. It is only the excessive and abusive possession of His gifts and absorption in our duties and relations that turns them into impediments in the path of our Christian life. And the flimsiness of the excuse is manifest by the fact that the contrariness is self-created.

III. Lastly, note the real reason.

I have said that as pretexts the three explanations were unsatisfactory. When a man pleads a previous engagement as a reason for not accepting an invitation, nine times out of ten it is a polite way of saying, 'I do not want to go.' It was so in this case. How all these absolute impossibilities, which made it perfectly out of the question that the three recreants should sit down at the table, would have melted into thin air if, by any chance, there had come into their minds a wish to be there! They would have found means to look after the field and the cattle and the home, and to be in their places notwithstanding, if they had wanted. The real reason that underlies men's turning away from Christ's offer is, as I said in the beginning of my remarks, that they do not care to have it. They have no inclinations and no tastes for the higher and purer blessings.

Brother, do not let us lose ourselves in generalities. I am talking about you, and about the set of your inclinations and tastes. And I want you to ask yourself whether it is not a fact that some of you like oxen better than God; whether it is not a fact that if the two were there before you, you would rather have a good big field made over to you than have the food that is spread upon that table.

Well then what is the cause of the perverted inclination? Why is it that when Christ says, 'Child, come

to Me, and I will give thee pardon, peace, purity, power, hope, Heaven, Myself,' there is no responsive desire kindled in the heart? Why do I not want God? Why do I not care for Jesus Christ? Why do the blessings about which preachers are perpetually talking seem to me so shadowy, so remote from anything that I need, so ill-fitting to anything that I desire? There must be something very deeply wrong. This is what is wrong, your heart has shaken itself loose from dependence upon God; and you have no love as you ought to have for Him. You prefer to stand alone. The prodigal son, having gone away into the far country, likes the swine's husks better than the bread in his father's house, and it is only when the supply of the latter coarse dainty gives out that the purer taste becomes strong. Strange, is it not? but yet it is true.

Now there are one or two things that I want to say about this indifference, resulting from preoccupation and from alienation, and which hides its ugliness behind all manner of flimsy excuses. One is that the reason itself is utterly unreasonable. I have said the true reason is indifference. Can anybody put into words which do not betray the absurdity of the position, the conduct of the man who says, 'I do not want God; give me five yoke of oxen. That is the real good, and I will stick by that.' There is one mystery in the world, and if it were solved everything would be solved; and that mystery is that men turn away from God and cleave to earth. No account can be given of sin. No account can be given of man's preference for the lesser and the lower; and neglect of the greater and the higher, except to say it is utterly inexplicable and unreasonable.

I need not say such indifference is shameful ingrati-



tude to the yearning love which provides, and the infinite sacrifice by which was provided, this great feast to which we are asked. It cost Christ pains, and tears, and blood, to prepare that feast, and He looks to us, and says to us, 'Come and drink of the wine which I have mingled, and eat of the bread which I have provided at such a cost.' There are monsters of ingratitude, but there are none more miraculously monstrous than the men who look, as some of us are doing, untouched on Christ's sacrifice, and listen unmoved to Christ's pleadings.

The excuses will disappear one day. We can trick our consciences; we can put off the messengers; we cannot deceive the Host. All the thin curtains that we weave to veil the naked ugliness of our unwillingness to accept Christ will be burnt up one day. And I pray you to ask yourselves, 'What shall I say when He comes and asks me, "Why was thy place empty at My table"?' 'And he was speechless.' Do not, dear brethren, refuse that gift, lest you bring upon yourselves the terrible and righteous wrath of the Host whose invitation you are slighting, and at whose table you are refusing to sit.

### THE RASH BUILDER

'Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?'—LUKE XIV. 28.

CHRIST sought for no recruits under false pretences, but rather discouraged than stimulated light-hearted adhesion. His constant effort was to sift the crowds that gathered round Him. So here great multitudes are following Him, and how does He welcome them? Does He lay Himself out to attract them? Luke tells

us that He *turned* and faced the following multitude; and then, with a steady hand, drenched with cold water the too easily kindled flame. Was that because He did not wish them to follow Him? He desired every soul in that crowd for His own, and He knew that the best way to attract is sometimes to repel; and that a plain statement of the painful consequences of a course will quench no genuine enthusiasm, but may turn a mere flash in the pan into a purpose that will flame through a life.

So our Lord lays down in stringent words the law of discipleship as being self-sacrifice; the abandonment of the dearest, and the acceptance of the most painful. And then He illustrates the law by these two expanded similes or condensed parables, of the rash builder and the rash soldier. Each contains a side of the Christian life, and represents one phase of what a true disciple ought to be. I wish to look with you now at the first of these two comparisons.

I. Consider then, first, the building, or the true aim of discipleship.

The building of the tower represents what every human life ought to aim at, the rearing up of a strong, solid structure in which the builder may dwell and be at rest.

But then remember we are always building, consciously or unconsciously. By our transitory actions we are all rearing up a house for our souls in which we have to dwell; building character from out of the fleeting acts of conduct, which character we have to carry with us for ever. Soft invertebrate animals secrete their own shells. That is what we are doing—making character, which is the shield of self, as it were; and in which we have to abide.

My friend, what are you building? A prison; a mere garden-house of lustful delights; or a temple fortress in which God may dwell revered, and you may abide restful? Observe that whilst all men are thus unconsciously and habitually rearing up a permanent abode by their transient actions, every life that is better than a brute's ought to have for its aim the building up of ourselves into firm strength. The development of character is what we ought to ask from, and to secure by, this fleeting life of ours. Not enjoyment; that is a miserable aim. Not the satisfaction of earthly desires; not the prosperity of our business or other ordinary avocations. The demand that we should make upon life, and the aim which we should have clearly before us in all that we do, is that it may contribute to the formation of a pure and noble self, to the development of character into that likeness to Jesus Christ, which is perfection and peace and blessedness.

And while that is true about all life, it is eminently true in regard to the highest form of life, which is the Christian life. There are dreadful mistakes and imperfections in the ordinary vulgar conception of what a Christian is, and what he is a Christian for. What do you think men and women are meant to be Christians for? That they may get away from some material and outward hell? Possibly. That they may get celestial happiness? Certainly. But are these the main things? By no means. What people are meant to be Christians for is that they may be shaped into the likeness of Jesus Christ; or to go back to the metaphor of my text, the meaning and aim of Christian discipleship is not happiness, but the building up of the tower in which the man may dwell.

Ah, friend; is that your notion of what a Christian

is; and of what he is a Christian for, to be like the Master? Alas! alas! how few of us, honestly and continually and practically, lay to heart the stringent and grand conception which underlies this metaphor of our Lord's, who identifies the man that was thinking of being His disciple with the man that sits down intending to build a tower.

II. So, secondly, note the cost of the building, or the conditions of discipleship.

Building is an expensive amusement, as many a man who has gone rashly in for bricks and mortar has found out to his cost. And the most expensive of all sorts of building is the building up of Christian character. That costs more than anything else, but there are a number of other things less noble and desirable, which share with it, to some extent, in the expenditure which it involves.

Discipleship demands constant reference to the plan. A man that lives as he likes, by impulse, by inclination, or ignobly yielding to the pressure of circumstances and saying, 'I could not help myself, I was carried away by the flood,' or 'Everybody round about me is doing it, and I could not be singular'—will never build anything worth living in. It will be a born ruin—if I may so say. There must be continual reference to the plan. That is to say, if a man is to do anything worth doing, there must be a very clear marking out to himself of what he means to secure by life, and a keeping of the aim continually before him as his guide and his pole-star. Did you ever see the pretty architect's plans, that were all so white and neat when they came out of his office, after the masons have done with them—all thumb-marked and dirty? I wonder if your Bibles are like that? Do we refer to the standard of conduct with



anything like the continual checking of our work by the architect's intention, which every man who builds anything that will stand is obliged to practise? Consult your plan, the pattern of your Master, the words of your Redeemer, the gospel of your God, the voice of judgment and conscience, and get into the habit of living, not like a vegetable, upon what happens to be nearest its roots, nor like a brute, by the impulses of the unreasoning nature, but clear above these put the understanding, and high above that put the conscience, and above them all put the will of the Lord. Consult your plan if you want to build your tower.

Then, further, another condition is continuous effort. You cannot 'rush' the building of a great edifice. You have to wait till the foundations get consolidated, and then by a separate effort every stone has to be laid in its bed and out of the builder's hands. So by slow degrees, with continuity of effort, the building rises.

Now there has been a great deal of what I humbly venture to call one-sidedness talked about the way by which Christian character is to be developed and perfected. And one set of the New Testament metaphors upon that subject has been pressed to the exclusion of the others, and the effortless growth of the plant has been presented as if it were the complete example of Christian progress. I know that Jesus Christ has said: 'First the blade, then the ear; after that the full corn in the ear.' But I know that He has also said, 'Which of you, intending to build a tower'—and that involves the idea of effort; and that He has further said, 'Or what king, going to make war against another king'—and that involves the idea of antagonism and conflict. And so, on the whole, I lay it down that this is one of the conditions of building the tower, that the

energy of the builder should never slacken, but, with continual renewal of effort, he should rear his life's building.

And then, still further, there is the fundamental condition of all; and that is, self-surrender. Our Lord lays this down in the most stringent terms in the words before my text, where He points to two directions in which that spirit is required to manifest itself. One is detachment from persons that are dearest, and even from one's own selfish life; the other is the acceptance of things that are most contrary to one's inclinations, against the grain, painful and hard to bear. And so we may combine these two in this statement: If any man is going to build a Christlike life he will have to detach himself from surrounding things and dear ones, and to crucify self by suppression of the lower nature and the endurance of evils. The preceding parable which is connected in subject with the text, the story of the great supper, and the excuses made for not coming to it, represents two-thirds of the refusals as arising from the undue love for, and regard to, earthly possessions, and the remaining third as arising from the undue love to, and regard for, the legitimate objects of affection. And these are the two chords that hold most of us most tightly. It is not Christianity alone, dear brethren, that says that if you want to do anything worth doing, you must detach yourself from outward wealth. It is not Christianity alone that says that, if you want to build up a noble life, you must not let earthly love dominate and absorb your energy; but it is Christianity that says so most emphatically, and that has best reason to say so.

Concentration is the secret of all excellence. If the

river is to have any scour in it that will sweep away pollution and corruption, it must not go winding and lingering in many curves, howsoever flowery may be the banks, nor spreading over a broad bed, but you must straighten it up and make it deep that it may run strong. And if you will diffuse yourself all over these poor, wretched worldly goods, or even let the rush of your heart's outflow go in the direction of father and mother, wife and children, brethren and sisters, forgetting Him, then you will never come to any good nor be of use in this world. But if you want to be Christians after Christ's pattern, remember that the price of the building is rigidly to sacrifice self, 'to scorn delights and live laborious days,' and to keep all vagrant desires and purposes within rigid limits, and absolutely subordinated to Himself.

On the other hand, there is to be the acceptance of what is painful to the lower nature. Unpleasant consequences of duty have to be borne, and the lower self, with its appetites and desires, has to be crucified. The vine must be mercilessly pruned in tendrils, leaves, and branches even, though the rich sap may seem to bleed away to waste, if we are to grow precious grapes out of which may be expressed the wine of the Kingdom. We must be dead to much if we are to be alive to anything worth living for.

Now remember that Christ's demand of self-surrender, self-sacrifice, continuous effort, rigid limitation, does not come from any mere false asceticism, but is inevitable in the very nature of the case, and is made also by all worthy work. How much every one of us has had to shear off our lives, how many tastes we have had to allow to go ungratified, how many capacities undeveloped, in how many directions we

have had to hedge up our way, and not do, or be this, that, or the other; if we have ever done anything in any direction worthy the doing! Concentration and voluntary limitation, in order to fix all powers on the supreme aim which judgment and conscience have enjoined is the condition of all excellence, of all sanity of living, and eminently of all Christian discipleship.

III. Further, note the failures.

The tower of the rash builder stands a gaunt, staring ruin.

Whosoever throws himself upon great undertakings or high aims, without a deliberate forecast of the difficulties and sacrifices they involve, is sure to stop almost before he has begun. Many a man and woman leaves the starting-point with a rush, as if they were going to be at the goal presently, and before they have run fifty yards turn aside and quietly walk out of the course. I wonder how many of you began, when you were lads or girls, to study some language, and stuck before you had got through twenty pages of the grammar, or to learn some art, and have still got the tools lying unused in a dusty corner. And how many of you who call yourselves Christians began in the same fashion long ago to run the race? 'Ye did run well.' What did hinder you? What hindered Atalanta? The golden apples that were flung down on the path. Oh, the Church is full of these abortive Christians; ruins from their beginning, standing gaunt and windowless, the ground-plan a great palace, the reality a hovel that has not risen a foot for the last ten years. I wonder if there are any stunted Christians of that sort in this congregation before me, who began under the influence of some impulse or emotion,



genuine enough, no doubt, but who had taken no account of how much it would cost to finish the building. And so the building is not finished, and never will be.

But I should remark here that what I am speaking about as failure is not incomplete attainment of the aim. For all our lives have to confess that they incompletely attain their aim; and lofty aims, imperfectly realised, and still maintained, are the very salt of life, and beautiful 'as the new moon with a ragged edge, e'en in its imperfection beautiful.' Paul was an old man and an advanced Christian when he said, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after.' And the highest completeness to which the Christian builder can reach in this life is the partial accomplishment of his aim and the persistent adherence to and aspiration after the unaccomplished aim. It is not these incomplete but progressive and aspiring lives that are failures, but it is the lives of men who have abandoned high aims, and have almost forgotten that they ever cherished them.

And what does our Lord say about such? That everybody laughs at them. It is not more than they deserve. An out-and-out Christian will often be disliked, but if he is made a mock of there will be a *souçon* of awe and respect even in the mockery. Half-and-half Christians get, and richly deserve, the curled lip and sarcasm of a world that knows when a man is in earnest, and knows when he is an incarnate sham.

IV. Lastly, I would have you observe the inviting encouragement hidden in the apparent repelling warning.

If we read my text isolated, it may seem as if the only lesson that our Lord meant to be drawn from it was a counsel of despair. 'Unless you feel quite sure that you can finish, you had better not begin.' Is that what He meant to say? I think not. He did mean to say, 'Do not begin without opening your eyes to what is involved in the beginning.' But suppose a man had taken His advice, had listened to the terms, and had said, 'I cannot keep them, and I am going to fling all up, and not try any more'—is that what Jesus Christ wanted to bring him to? Surely not. And that it is not so arises plainly enough from the observation that this parable and the succeeding one are both sealed up, as it were, with 'So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.'

Now, if I may so say, there are two kinds of 'forsaking all that we have.' One is the forsaking by which we become disciples; and the other the forsaking by which we continue true disciples. The conviction that they had not sufficient to finish is the very conviction that Christ wished to root in the minds of the crowds. He exhibits the difficulties in order that they may feel they cannot cope with them. What then? That they may 'forsake' all their own power to cope with them.

That is the first kind of 'forsaking all that we have.' That makes a disciple. The recognition of my own utter impotence to do the things which yet I see must be done, is the underside of trust in Him. And that trust in Him brings the power that makes it possible for us to do the things which we cannot of ourselves do, and the consciousness of the impotence to do which is the first step toward doing them. It is the self-sufficient man who is sure to be bankrupt before he has finished his building; but he who has no confidence in himself,

and recognises the fact that he cannot build, will go to Jesus Christ and say, 'Lord, I am poor and needy. Come Thou Thyself and be my strength.' Such a forsaking of all that we have in the recognition of our own poverty and powerlessness brings into the field an Ally for our reinforcement that has more than the twenty thousand that are coming against us, and will make us strong.

And then, if, knowing our weakness, our misery, our poverty, and cleaving to Jesus Christ in simple confidence in His divine power breathed into our weakness, and His abundant riches lavished upon our poverty, we cast ourselves into the work to which He calls us by His grace, then we shall find that the sweet and certain assurance that we have Him for the possession and the treasure of our lives will make parting with everything else, not painful, but natural and necessary and a joy, as the expression of our supreme love to Him. It should not, and would not be difficult to fling away paste gems and false riches if our hands were filled with the jewels that Christ bestows. And it will not be difficult to slay the old man when the new Christ lives in us, by our faith and submission.

So, dear brethren, it all comes to this. We are all builders; what kind of a work is your life's work going to turn out? Are you building on the foundation, taking Jesus Christ for the anchor of your hope, for the basis of your belief, for the crown of your aims, for your all and in all? Are you building upon Him? If so, then the building will stand when the storm comes and the 'hail sweeps away the refuges' that other men have built elsewhere. But are you building on that foundation the gold of self-denial, the silver of white purity, the precious stones of variously-coloured and

Christlike virtues? Then your work will indeed be incomplete, but its very incompleteness will be a prophecy of the time when 'the headstone shall be brought forth with shoutings'; and you may humbly trust that the day which 'declares every man's work of what sort it is' will not destroy yours, but that it will gleam and flash in the light of the revealing and reflecting fires. See to it that you are building *for* eternity, *on* the foundation, *with* the fair stones which Jesus Christ gives to all those who let Him shape their lives. He is at once, Architect, Material, Foundation; and in Him 'every several building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple in the Lord.'

### 'THAT WHICH WAS LOST'

'An hundred sheep . . . ten pieces of silver, . . . two sons.'—LUKE XV. 4, 8, 11.

THE immediate occasion of these three inimitable parables, which have found their way to the heart of the world, needs to be remembered in order to grasp their import and importance. They are intended to vindicate Christ's conduct in associating with outcasts and disreputable persons whom His Pharisaical critics thought a great deal too foul to be touched by clean hands. They were not meant to set forth with anything like completeness either what wanderers had to do to go back to God, or what God had done to bring wanderers back to Himself. If this had been remembered, many misconceptions, widespread and mischievous, especially affecting the meaning of the last of the three parables—that of the Prodigal Son—would have been avoided. The purpose of the parables



accounts for Christ's accepting the division which His antagonists made of men, into 'righteous,' like themselves, and 'unclean,' like the publicans and sinners. There was a far deeper truth to be spoken about the condition of humanity than that. But for the purposes of His argument Christ passes it by. The remembrance of the intention of the parables explains their incompleteness as a statement of what people call 'the way of salvation.' They were not meant to teach us that, but they were meant to show us that a human instinct which prizes lost things because they are lost has something corresponding to it in the divine nature, and so to vindicate the conduct of Christ.

I venture to isolate these three statements of the subjects of the parables, because I think that looking at the threefold aspect in which the one general thought is presented may help us to some useful considerations.

I. I ask you, then, to look with me, first, at the varying causes of loss.

The sheep was lost, the *drachma* was lost, the son was lost. But in each case the reason for the loss was different. Whilst I would avoid all fanciful inserting into our Lord's words of more than they can fairly bear, I would also avoid superficial evacuating them of any of their depth of significance. So I think it is not unintentional nor unimportant that in these three metaphors there are set forth three obviously distinct operative causes for man's departure from God.

The sheep did not intend to go anywhere, either to keep with or to leave the shepherd. It simply knew that grass was sweet, and that there, ahead of it, was another tuft, and it went after that. So it nibbled itself away out of the path, out of the shepherd's care,

out of the flock's companionship. It was heedless; and therefore it was lost.

Now that is a fair statement of facts in regard to thousands of men, of whom I have no doubt there are some listening to me now. They do not intend any mischief, they have no purpose of rebellion or transgression, but they live what we call animal lives. The sheep knows only where the herbage is abundant and fresh; and it goes there. An animal has no foresight, and is the happier because it cannot look before and after. It has only a rudimentary conscience, if it has that. Its inclinations are restrained by no sense of obligation. Many men live just so, without restraint upon appetite, without checking of inclination, without foresight except of the material good which a certain course of conduct may get. So, all unwitting, meaning no mischief, they wander further and further from the right road, and find themselves at last in a waterless desert.

Dear friends, am I speaking to any now who have too much yielded to inclinations, who have been unwilling to look forward to the end, and ask themselves what all will come to at the last, and who scarcely know what it is to take heed unto their ways, except in so far as worldly prudence may dictate certain courses of conduct for the purpose of securing certain worldly and perishable ends? I would plead, especially with the younger portion of my congregation, to take the touching picture of this first parable as a solemn prophecy of what certainly befalls every man who sets out upon his path without careful consideration of whither it leads to at the last; and who lives for the present, in any of its forms, and who lets himself be led by inclinations or appetites. The animal

does so, and, as a rule, its instincts are its sufficient guide. But you and I are blessed or cursed, as the case may be, with higher powers, which, if we do not use, we shall certainly land in the desert. If a man who is meant to guide himself by intelligence, reason, will, foresight, conscience, chooses to go down to the level of the beast, the faculties that serve the beast will not serve the man. And even the sheep is lost from the flock if it yields only to these.

But how it speaks of the Lord's tender sympathy for the wanderers that He should put in the forefront of the parables this explanation of the condition of men, and should not at first charge it upon them as sin, but only as heedlessness and folly! There is much that in itself is wrong and undesirable, the criminality of which is diminished by the fact that it was heedlessly done, though the heedlessness itself is a crime.

Now turn to the second parable. The coin was heavy, so it fell; it was round, so it rolled; it was dead, so it lay. And there are people who are things rather than persons, so entirely have they given up their wills, and so absolutely do they let themselves be determined by circumstances. It was not the *drachma* that lost itself, but it was the law of gravitation that lost it, and it had no power of resistance. This also is an explanation—partial, as I shall have to show you in a moment, but still real,—of a great deal of human wandering. There are masses of men who have no more power to resist the pressure of circumstances and temptations than the piece of silver had when it dropped from the woman's open palm and trundled away into some dark corner. That lightens the darkness of much of the world's sin.

But for you to abnegate the right and power of resisting circumstances is to abdicate the sovereignty with which God has crowned you. All men are shaped by externals, but the shape which the externals impose upon us is settled by ourselves. Here are two men, for instance, exposed to precisely the same conditions: but one of them yields, and is ruined; the other resists, and is raised and strengthened. As Jesus Christ, so all things have a double operation. They are 'either a savour of life unto life or a savour of death unto death.' There is the stone. You may build upon it, or you may stumble over it: you take your choice. Here is the adverse circumstance. You may rule it, or you may let it rule you. Circumstances and outward temptations are the fool's masters, and the wise man's servants. It all depends on the set of the sail and the firmness of the hand that grasps the tiller, which way the wind shall carry the ship. The same breeze speeds vessels on directly opposite courses, and so the same circumstances may drive men in two contrary directions, sending the one further and further away from, and drawing the other nearer and nearer to, the haven of their hearts.

Dear friends, as we have to guard against the animal life of yielding to inclinations and inward impulse, of forgetting the future, and of taking no heed to our paths, so, unless we wish to ruin ourselves altogether, we have to fight against the mechanical life which, with a minimum of volition, lets the world do with us what it will. And sure I am that there are men and women in this audience at this time who have let their lives be determined by forces that have swept them away from God.

In the third parable the foolish boy had no love



to his father to keep him from emigrating. He wanted to be his own master, and to get away into a place where he thought he could sow his wild oats and no news of it ever reach the father's house. He wanted to have the fingering of the money, and to enjoy the sense of possession. And so he went off on his unblessed road to the harlots and the swine's trough.

And *that* is no parable; that is a picture. The other two were parabolical representations; this is the thing itself. For carelessness of the bonds that knit a heart to God; hardness of an unresponsive heart unmelted by benefits; indifference to the blessedness of living by a Father's side and beneath His eye; the uprising of a desire of independence and the impatience of control; the exercise of selfwill—these are causes of loss that underlie the others of which I have been speaking, and which make for every one of us the essential sinfulness of our sin. It is rebellion, and it is rebellion against a Father's love.

Now, notice, that whilst the other two that we have been speaking about do partially explain the terrible fact that we go away from God, their explanation is only partial, and this grimmer truth underlies them. There are modern theories, as there were ancient ones, that say: 'Oh! sin is a theological bugbear. There is not any such thing. It is only indifference, ignorance, error.' And then there are other theorists that say: 'Sin! There is no sin in following natural laws and impulses. Circumstances shape men; heredity shapes them. The notion that their actions are criminal is a mere figment of an exploded superstition.'

Yes! and down below the ignorance, and inadvertence, and error, and heredity, and domination of

externals, there lies the individual choice in each case. The man knows—however he sophisticates himself, or uses other people to provide him with sophistries—that he need not have done that thing unless he had chosen to do it. You cannot get beyond or argue away that consciousness. And so I say that all these immoral teachings, which are very common to-day, omit from the thing that they profess to analyse the very characteristic element of it, which is, as our Lord taught us, not the following inclination like a silly sheep; not the rolling away, in obedience to natural law, like the drachma; but the rising up of a rebellious will that desires a separation, and kicks against control, as in the case of the son.

So, dear friends, whilst I thankfully admit that much of the darkness of human conduct may be lightened by the representations of our two first parables, I cannot but feel that we have to leave to God the determination in each case of how far these have diminished individual criminality; and that we have to remember for ourselves that our departure from God is not explicable unless we recognise the fact that we have chosen rather to be away from Him than to be with Him; and that we like better to have our goods at our own disposal, and to live as it pleases ourselves.

II. So note, secondly, the varying proportions of loss and possession.

A hundred sheep; ten drachmas; two sons. The loss in one case is 1 per cent., a trifle; in the other case 10 per cent., more serious; in the last case 50 per cent., heartbreaking. Now, I do not suppose that our Lord intended any special significance to be

attached to these varying numbers. Rather they were simply suggested by the cast of the parable in which they respectively occurred. A hundred sheep is a fair average flock; ten pieces of silver are the modest hoard of a poor woman; two sons are a family large enough to represent the contrast which is necessary to the parable. But still we may permissibly look at this varying proportion in order to see whether it, too, cannot teach us something.

It throws light upon the owner's care and pains in seeking. In one aspect, these are set forth most strikingly by the parable in which the thing lost bears the smallest proportion to the thing still retained. The shepherd might well have said: 'One in a hundred does not matter much. I have got the ninety and nine.' But he went to look for it. But, in another aspect, the woman, of course, has a more serious loss to face, and possibly seeks with more anxiety. And when you come up to the last case, where half the household is blotted out, as it were, then we can see the depth of anxiety and pains and care which must necessarily follow.

But beyond the consideration that the ascending proportion suggests increasing pains and anxiety, there is another lesson, which seems to me even more precious, and it is this, that it matters very little to the loser how much he keeps, or what the worth of the lost thing is. There is something in human nature which makes anything that is lost precious by reason of its loss. Nobody can tell how large a space a tree fills until it is felled. If you lose one tiny stone out of a ring, or a bracelet, it makes a gap, and causes annoyance altogether disproportionate to the lustre that it had when it was there. A man

loses a small portion of his fortune in some unlucky speculation, and the loss annoys him a great deal more than the possession solaced him, and he thinks more about the hundreds that have vanished than about the thousands that remain. Men are made so. It is a human instinct, that apart altogether from the consideration of its intrinsic worth, and the proportion it bears to that which is still possessed, the lost thing draws, and the loser will take any pains to find it.

So Christ says, When a woman will light a candle and sweep the house and search diligently till she finds her lost sixpence (for the drachma was worth little more), and will bring in all her neighbours to rejoice with her, that is like God; and the human instinct which prizes lost things, not because of their value, but because they are lost, has something corresponding to it in the heart of the Majesty of the heavens. It is Christ's vindication, of course, as I need not remind you, of His own conduct. He says in effect, to these Pharisees, 'You are finding fault with Me for doing what we all do. I am only acting in accordance with a natural human instinct; and when I thus act God Himself is acting in and through Me.'

If I had time, I think I could show that this principle, brought out in my texts, really sweeps away one of the difficulties which modern science has to suggest against Evangelical Christianity. We hear it said, 'How can you suppose that a speck of a world like this, amidst all these flaming orbs that stud the infinite depths of the heavens, is of so much importance in God's sight that His Son came down to die for it?' The magnitude of the world, as compared with others, has nothing to do with the question. God's action is determined by



its moral condition. If it be true that here is sin, which rends men away from Him, and that so they are lost, then it is supremely natural that all the miracles of the Christian revelation should follow. The *rationale* of the Incarnation lies in this, 'A certain man had a hundred sheep. . . . One of them went astray . . . and He went into the wilderness and found it.'

III. Now I meant to have said a word about the varying glimpses that we have here, into God's claims upon us, and His heart.

Ownership is the word that describes His relation to us in the first two parables; love is the word that describes it in the third. But the ownership melts into love, because God does not reckon that He possesses men by natural right of creation or the like, unless they yield their hearts to Him, and give themselves, by their own joyful self-surrender, into His hands. But I must not be tempted to speak upon that matter; only, before I close, let me point you to that most blessed and heart-melting thought, that God accounts Himself to have lost something when a man goes away from Him.

That word 'the lost' has another, and in some senses a more tragical, significance in Scripture. The lost are lost to themselves and to blessedness. The word implies destruction; but it also carries with it this, that God prizes us, is glad to have us, and, I was going to say, feels an incompleteness in His possessions when men depart from Him.

Oh, brethren, surely such a thought as that should melt us; and if, as is certainly the case, we have strayed away from Him into green pastures, which have ended in a wilderness, without a blade of grass; or if we have rolled away from Him in passive sub-

mission to circumstances; or if we have risen up in rebellion against Him, and claimed our separate right of possession and use of the goods that fall to us, if we would only think that He considers that He has lost us, and prizes us because we are lost to Him, and wants to get us back again, surely, surely it would draw us to Himself. Think of the greatness of the love into which the ownership is merged, as measured by the infinite price which He has paid to bring us back, and let us all say, 'I will arise and go to my Father.'

## THE PRODIGAL AND HIS FATHER

'And He said, A certain man had two sons: 12. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. 13. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. 14. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. 17. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, 19. And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. 20. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.'—LUKE xv. 11-24.

THE purpose of the three parables in this chapter has to be kept in mind. Christ is vindicating His action in receiving sinners, which had evoked the murmurings of the Pharisees. The first two parables, those of the lost sheep and the lost drachma, appeal to the common feeling which attaches more importance to lost pro-

perty just because it is lost than to that which is possessed safely. This parable rises to a higher level. It appeals to the universal emotion of fatherhood, which yearns over a wandering child just because he has wandered.

We note a further advance, in the proportion of one stray sheep to the ninety-nine, and of one lost coin to the nine, contrasted with the sad equality of obedience and disobedience in the two sons. One per cent., ten per cent., are bearable losses, but fifty per cent. is tragic.

I. The first part (vs. 11-16) tells of the son's wish to be his own master, and what came of it. The desire to be independent is good, but when it can only be attained by being dependent on him whose authority is irksome, it takes another colour. This foolish boy wished to be able to use his father's property as his own, but he had to get the father's consent first. It is a poor beginning of independence when it has to be set up in business by a gift.

That is the essential absurdity in our attempts to do without God and to shake off His control. We can only get power to seem to do it by misusing His gifts. When we say, 'Who is Lord over us?' the tongues which say it were given us by Him. The next step soon followed. 'Not many days after,' of course, for the sense of ownership could not be kept up while near the father. A man who wishes to enjoy worldly good without reference to God is obliged, in self-defence, to hustle God out of his thoughts as soon and as completely as possible.

The 'far country' is easily reached; and it is far, though a step can land us in it. A narrow bay may compel a long journey round its head before those on

its opposite shores can meet. Sin takes us far away from God, and the root of all sin is that desire of living to one's self which began the prodigal's evil course.

The third step in his downward career, wasting his substance in riotous living, comes naturally after the two others; for all self-centred life is in deepest truth waste, and the special forms of gross dissipation to which youth is tempted are only too apt to follow the first sense of being their own masters, and removed from the safeguards of their earthly father's home. Many a lad in our great cities goes through the very stages of the parable, and, when a mother's eye is no longer on him, plunges into filthy debauchery. But living which does not outrage the proprieties may be riotous all the same; for all conduct which ignores God and asserts self as supreme is flagrantly against the very nature of man, and is reckless waste.

Such a 'merry' life is sure to be 'short.' There is always famine in the land of forgetfulness of God, and when the first gloss is off its enjoyments, and one's substance is spent, its pinch is felt. The unsatisfied hunger of heart, which dogs godless living, too often leads but to deeper degradation and closer entanglement with low satisfactions. Men madly plunge deeper into the mud in hope of finding the pearl which has thus eluded their search.

A miserable thing this young fool had made of his venture, having spent his capital, and now being forced to become a slave, and being set to nothing better than to feed swine. The godless world is a hard master, and has very odious tasks for its bondsmen. The unclean animals are fit companions for one who made himself lower than they, since filth is natural to them and shameful for him. They are better off than he is, for

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husks do nourish them, and they get their fill, but he who has sunk to longing for swine's food cannot get even that. The dark picture is only too often verified in the experience of godless men.

II. The wastrel's returning sanity is described in verses 17-20a. 'He came to himself.' Then he had been beside himself before. It is insanity to try to shake off God, to aim at independence, to wander from Him, to fling away our 'substance,' that is, our true selves, and to starve among the swine-troughs. He remembers the bountiful housekeeping at home, as starving men dream of feasts, and he thinks of himself with a kind of pity and amazement.

There is no sign that his conscience smote him, or that his heart woke in love to his father. His stomach, and it only, urged him to go home. He did, indeed, feel that he had been wrong, and had forfeited the right to be called a son, but he did not care much for losing that name, or even for losing the love to which it had the right, if only he could get as much to eat as one of the hired servants, whose relation to the master was less close, and, in patriarchal times, less happy, than that of slaves born in the house.

One good thing about the lad was that he did not let the grass grow under his feet, but, as soon as he had made the resolution, began to carry it into effect. The bane of many a resolve to go back to God is that it is 'sicklied o'er' by procrastination. The ragged prodigal has not much to leave which need hold him, but many such a one says, 'I will arise and go to my father to-morrow,' and lets all the to-morrows become yesterdays, and is sitting among the swine still.

Low as the prodigal's motive for return was, the fact of his return was enough. So is it in regard to our

attitude to the gospel. Men may be drawn to give heed to its invitations from the instinct of self-preservation, or from their sense of hungry need, and the belief that in it they will find the food they crave for, while there may be little consciousness of longing for more from the Father than the satisfaction of felt wants. The longing for a place in the Father's heart will spring up later, but the beginning of most men's taking refuge in God as revealed in Christ is the gnawing of a hungry heart. The call to all is, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat.'

III. The climax of the parable, for which all the rest is but as scaffolding, is the father's welcome (vs. 20 b.-24). Filial love may die in the son's heart, but paternal yearning lives in the father's. The wanderer's heart would be likely to sink as he came nearer the father's tent. It had seemed easy to go back when he acted the scene in imagination, but every step homewards made the reality more difficult.

No doubt he hesitated when the old home came in sight, and perhaps his resolution would have oozed out at his finger ends if he had had to march up alone in his rags, and run the gauntlet of servants before he came to speech with his father. So his father's seeing him far off and running to meet him is exquisitely in keeping, as well as movingly setting forth how God's love goes out to meet His returning prodigals. That divine insight which discerns the first motions towards return, that divine pity which we dare venture to associate with His infinite love, that eager meeting the shamefaced and slow-stepping boy half-way, and that kiss of welcome before one word of penitence or request had been spoken, are all revelations of the heart

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of God, and its outgoings to every wanderer who sets his face to return.

Beautifully does the father's welcome make the son's completion of his rehearsed speech impossible. It does not prevent his expression of penitence, for the more God's love is poured over us, the more we feel our sin. But he had already been treated as a son, and could not ask to be taken as a servant. Beautifully, too, the father gives no verbal answer to the lad's confession, *cross* for his kiss had answered it already; but he issues instructions to the servants which show that the pair have now reached the home and entered it together.

The gifts to the prodigal are probably significant. They not only express in general the cordiality of the welcome, but seem to be capable of specific interpretations, as representing various aspects of the blessed results of return to God. The robe is the familiar emblem of character. The prodigal son is treated like the high-priest in Zechariah's vision; his rags are stripped off, and he is clothed anew in a dress of honour. 'Them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also sanctified.' The ring is a token of wealth, position, and honour. It is also a sign of delegated authority, and is an ornament to the hand. So God gives His prodigals, when they come back, an elevation which unforgiven beings do not reach, and sets them to represent Him, and arrays them in strange beauty. No doubt the lad had come back footsore and bleeding, and the shoes may simply serve to keep up the naturalness of the story. But probably they suggest equipment for the journey of life. That is one of the gifts that accompany forgiveness. Our feet are shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace.

Last of all comes the feast. Heaven keeps holiday

when some poor waif comes shrinking back to the Father. The prodigal had been content to sink his sonship for the sake of a loaf, but he could not get bread on such terms. He had to be forgiven and bathed in the outflow of his father's love before he could be fed; and, being thus received, he could not but be fed. The feast is for those who come back penitently, and are received forgivingly, and endowed richly by the Father in heaven.

### GIFTS TO THE PRODIGAL

'... Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it. ...'—  
LUKE xv. 22, 23.

God's giving always follows His forgiving. It is not so with us. We think ourselves very magnanimous when we pardon; and we seldom go on to lavish favours where we have overlooked faults. Perhaps it is right that men who have offended against men should earn restoration by acts, and should have to ride quarantine, as it were, for a time. But I question whether forgiveness is ever true which is not, like God's, attended by large-hearted gifts. If pardon is only the non-infliction of penalty, then it is natural enough that it should be considered sufficient by itself, and that the evildoer should not be rewarded for having been bad. But if pardon is the outflow of the love of the offended to the offender, then it can scarcely be content with simply giving the debtor his discharge, and turning him into the world penniless.

However that may be with regard to men, God's forgiveness is essentially the communication of God's

It looks  
beyond our  
faults



love to us sinners, as if we had never sinned at all. And, that being so, that love cannot stay its working until it has given all that it can bestow or we can receive. God does not do things by halves; and He always gives when He forgives.

Now that is the great truth of the last part of this immortal parable. And it is one of the points in which it differs from, and towers high above, the two preceding ones. The lost sheep was carried back to the pastures, turned loose there, needed no further special care, and began to nibble as if nothing had happened. The lost drachma was simply put back in the woman's purse. But the lost son was pardoned, and, being pardoned, was capable of receiving, and received, greater gifts than he had before. These gifts are very remarkably detailed in the words of our text.

Now, of course, it is always risky to seek for a spiritual interpretation of every point in a parable, many of which points are mere drapery. But, on the other hand, we may very easily fall into the error of treating as insignificant details which really are meant to be full of instruction. And I cannot help thinking—although many would differ from me,—that this detailed enumeration of the gifts to the prodigal is meant to be translated into the terms of spiritual experience. So I desire to look at them as suggesting for us the gifts of God which accompany forgiveness. I take the catalogue as it stands—the Robe, the Ring, the Shoes, the Feast.

#### I. First, the Robe.

‘Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.’ That was the command. This detail, of course, like all the others, refers back to, and casts light upon, the supposed condition of the spendthrift when he came back.

There he stood, ragged, with the stain of travel and the stench of the pig-sty upon his garments, some of them, no doubt, remains of the tawdry finery that he had worn in the world; wine-spots, and stains, and filth of all sorts on the rags. The father says, 'Take them all off him, and put the best robe upon him.' What does that mean?

Well, we all know the very familiar metaphor by which qualities of mind, traits of character, and the like are described as being the dress of the spirit. We talk about being 'arrayed in purity,' 'clad in zeal,' 'clothed with humility,' 'vested with power,' and so on. If we turn to Scripture, we find running through it a whole series of instances of this metaphor, which guide us at once to its true meaning. Zechariah saw in vision the high priest standing at the heavenly tribunal, clad in filthy garments. A voice said, 'Take away the filthy garments from him,' and the interpretation is added: 'Behold! I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with a change of raiment.' You remember our Lord's parable of the man with a wedding garment. You remember the Apostle Paul's frequent use of the metaphor of 'putting off the old man, putting on the new.' You remember, finally, the visions of the last days, in which the Seer in Patmos saw the armies in heaven that followed their victorious Commander, 'clothed in fine linen, white and pure, which is the righteousness of the saints.' If we put all these together, surely I am not forcing a meaning on a non-significant detail, when I say that here we have shadowed for us the great thought, that the result of the divine forgiveness coming upon a man is that he is clothed with a character which fits him to sit down at his Father's table. They tell us that

forgiveness is impossible, because things done must have their consequences, and that character is the slow formation of actions, precipitated, as it were, from our deeds. That is all true. But it does not conflict with this other truth that there may and does come into men's hearts, when they set their faith on Jesus Christ, a new power which transforms the nature, and causes old things to pass away.

God's forgiveness revolutionises a life. Similar effects follow even human pardons for small offences. Brute natures are held in by penalties, and to them pardon means impunity, and impunity means licence, and licence means lust. But wherever there is a heart with love to the offended in it, there is nothing that will so fill it with loathing of its past self as the assurance that the offended, though loved, One loves, and is not offended, and that free forgiveness has come. Whether is it the rod or the mother's kiss that makes a child hate its sin most? And if we lift our thoughts to Him, and think how He, up there in the heavens,

‘Who mightest vengeance best have took,’

bends over us in frank, free forgiveness, then surely that, more than all punishments or threatenings or terrors, will cause us to turn away from our evil, and to loathe the sins which are thus forgiven. The prophet went very deep when he said, ‘Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thine iniquity, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord.’

But not only so, there is given along with forgiveness, and wrapped up in it, a new power, which makes

all things new, and changes a man. It would be a poor Gospel for me to stand up and preach if I had only to proclaim to men the divine forgiveness; and if that only meant that hell's door was barred and some outward heaven was flung open. But the true Gospel offers forgiveness as preliminary to the bestowal of the highest gifts of God. The pardoned man is stripped of his rags and clothed with a new nature which God Himself bestows.

That is what we all need. We have not all been in the pig-sty; we have not all fallen into gross sin. We *have* all turned our backs on our Father; we *have* all wanted to be independent; we *have* all preferred the far-off land to being near home. And, dear brethren, the character that you have made for yourselves clings to you like the poisoned Nessus' shirt to Hercules. You cannot strip it off. You may get part of it away, but you cannot entirely cast it from your limbs, nor free yourselves from the entanglements of its tatters. Go to God, and He will smile away your sin, and His forgiving love will melt the stains and the evil, as the sun this morning drank up the mists; and they who come knowing themselves to be foul, and needing forgiveness, will surely receive from Him 'the fine linen - white' and pure, the righteousness of saints.'

## II. The Ring.

This prodigal lad only wanted to be placed in the position of a slave, but his father said, 'Put a ring on his finger.' The ring is an emblem of wealth, position, honour; that is one signification of this gift to the penitent. Still further, it is an ornament to the hand on which it glistens; that is another. It is a sign of delegated authority and of representative character; as when Joseph was exalted to be the second man in



Egypt, and Pharaoh's signet-ring was plucked off and placed upon his finger. All these thoughts are, as it seems to me, clustered in, and fairly deducible from, this one detail.

Freedom, exaltation, dignity of position are expressed. And that opens up a thought which needs to be set forth with many reservations, and much guarding, but still is true—viz., that, by the mercy and miraculous loving-kindness and quickening power of God in the Gospel, it is possible that the lower a man falls the higher he may rise. I know, of course, that it is better to be innocent than to be cleansed. I know, and every man that looks into his own heart knows, that forgiven sins may leave scars; that the memory may be loaded with many a foul and many a painful remembrance; that the fetters may be stricken off the limbs, but the marks of them, and the way of walking that they  
✓ compelled, may persist long after deliverance. But I know, too, that redeemed men are higher in final position than angels that never fell; and that, though it is too much to say that the greater the sinner the greater the saint, it still remains true that sin repented and forgiven may be, as it were, an elevation upon which a man may stand to reach higher than, apparently, he otherwise would in the divine life.

And so, though I do not say to any man, Make the experiment; for, indeed, the poorest of us has sins enough to get all the benefit out of repentance and forgiveness which is included in them, yet, if there is any man here—and I hope there is—saying to himself, 'I have got too low down ever to master this, that, or the other evil; I have stained myself so foully that I cannot hope to have the black marks erased,' I say to such; 'Remember that the man who ended with a ring

on his finger, honoured and dignified, was the man that had herded with pigs, and stank, and all but rotted, with his fleshly crimes.' And so nobody need doubt but that for him, however low he has gone, and however far he has gone, there is restoration possible to a higher dignity than the pure spirits that never transgressed at any time God's commandment will ever attain; for he who has within himself the experience of repentance, of pardon, and who has come into living contact with Jesus Christ as Redeemer, can teach angels how blessed it is to be a child of God.

Nor less distinctly are the other two things which I have referred to brought out in this metaphor. Not only is the ring the sign of dignity, but it is also the sign of delegated authority and representative character. God sets poor penitents to be His witnesses in His world, and to do His work here. And a ring is an ornament to the hand that wears it; which being translated is this: where God gives pardon, He gives a strange beauty of character, to which, if a man is true to himself, and to his Redeemer, he will assuredly attain. There should be no lives so lovely, none that flash with so many jewelled colours, as the lives of the men and women who have learned what it is to be miserable, what it is to repent, what it is to be forgiven. So, though our 'hands have been full of blood,' as the prophet says, though they have dabbled in all manner of pollution, though they have been the ready instruments of many evil things, we may all hope that, cleansed and whitened, even our hands will not want the lustre of that adornment which the loving father clasped upon the fingers of his penitent boy.

III. Further, 'Shoes on his feet.'

No doubt he had come back barefooted and filthy and

bleeding, and it was needful for the 'keeping' of the narrative that this detail should appear. But I think it is something more than drapery.

✓ Does it not speak to us of equipment for the walk of life? God *does* prepare men for future service, and for every step that they have to take, by giving to them His forgiveness for all that is past. The sense of the divine pardon will in itself fit a man, as nothing else will, for running with patience the race that is set before him. God does communicate, along with His forgiveness, to every one who seeks it, actual power to 'travel on life's common way in cheerful godliness'; and his feet are 'shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace.'

Ah, brethren, life is a rough road for us all, and for those whose faces are set towards duty, and God, and self-denial, it is especially so, though there are many compensating circumstances. There are places where sharp flints stick up in the path and cut the feet. There are places where rocks jut out for us to stumble over. There are all the trials and sorrows that necessarily attend upon our daily lives, and which sometimes make us feel as if our path were across heated ploughshares, and every step was a separate agony. God will give us, if we go to Him for pardon, that which will defend us against the pains and the sorrows of life. The bare foot is cut by that which the shod foot tramples upon unconscious.

There are foul places on all our paths, over which, when we pass, if we have not something else than our own naked selves, we shall certainly contract defilement. God will give to the penitent man, if he will have it, that which will keep his feet from soil, even when they walk amidst filth. And if, at any time,

notwithstanding the defence, some mud should stain the foot, and he that is washed needs again to wash his feet, the Master, with the towel and the basin, will not be far away.

There are enemies and dangers in life. A very important part of the equipment of the soldier in antiquity was the heavy boot, which enabled him to stand fast, and resist the rush of the enemy. God will give to the penitent man, if he will have it, that which will set his foot upon a rock, 'and establish his goings,' and which 'will make him able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.'

Brethren, defence, stability, shielding from pains, and protection against evil are all included in this great promise, which each of us may realise, if we will, for ourselves.

#### IV. Lastly, the Feast.

Now that comes into view in the parable, mainly as teaching us the great truth that Heaven keeps holiday, when some poor waif comes shrinking back to his Father. But I do not touch upon that truth now, though it is the main significance of this last part of the story.

The prodigal was half starving, and the fatted calf was killed 'for him,' as his ill-conditioned brother grumbled. Remember what it was that drove him back—not his heart, nor his conscience, but his stomach. He did not bethink himself to go back, because dormant filial affection woke up, or because a sense that he had been wrong stirred in him, but because he was hungry; and well he might be, when 'the husks that the swine did eat' were luxuries beyond his reach. Thank God for the teaching that even so low a motive as that is accepted by God; and that, if a man goes back, even



for no better reason—as long as he does go back, he will be welcomed by the Father. This poor boy was quite content to sink his sonship for the sake of a loaf; and all that he wanted was to stay his hunger. So he had to learn that he could not get bread on the terms that he desired, and that what he wished most was not what he needed first. He had to be forgiven and bathed in the outflow of his father's love before he could be fed. And, being thus received, he could not fail to be fed. So the message for us is, first, forgiveness, and then every hunger of the heart satisfied; all desires met; every needful nourishment communicated, and the true bread ours for ever, if we choose to eat. 'The meek shall eat and be satisfied.'

I need not draw the picture—that picture of which there are many originals sitting in these pews before me—of the men that go for ever roaming with a hungry heart, through all the regions of life separate from God; and whether they seek their nourishment in the garbage of the sty, or whether fastidiously they look for it in the higher nutriment of mind and intellect and heart, still are condemned to be unfilled.

Brethren, 'Why do you spend your money for that . . . which satisfies not?' Here is the true way for all desires to be appeased. Go to God in Jesus Christ for forgiveness, and then everything that you need shall be yours. 'I counsel thee to buy of Me . . . white raiment that thou mayest be clothed.' 'He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.'

## THE FOLLIES OF THE WISE

‘The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.’—LUKE xvi. 8.

THE parable of which these words are the close is remarkable in that it proposes a piece of deliberate roguery as, in some sort, a pattern for Christian people. The steward’s conduct was neither more nor less than rascality, and yet, says Christ, ‘Do like that!’

The explanation is to be found mainly in the consideration that what was faithless sacrifice of his master’s interests, on the part of the steward, is, in regard to the Christian man’s use of earthly gifts, the right employment of the possessions which have been entrusted to him. But there is another vindication of the singular selection of such conduct as an example, in the consideration that what is praised is not the dishonesty, but the foresight, realisation of the facts of the case, promptitude, wisdom of various kinds exhibited by the steward. And so says our Lord—shutting out the consideration of ends, and looking only for a moment at means,—the world can teach the Church a great many lessons; and it would be well for the Church if its members lived in the fashion in which the men of the world do. There is eulogium here, a recognition of splendid qualities, prostituted to low purposes; a recognition of wisdom in the adaptation of means to an end; and a limitation of the recognition, because it is only *in their generation* that ‘the children of this world are wiser than the children of light.’

I. So we may look, first, at these two classes, which our Lord opposes here to one another.

‘The children of this world’ would have, for their natural antithesis, the children of another world. The ‘children of light’ would have, for their natural antithesis, ‘the children of darkness.’ But our Lord so orders His words as to suggest a double antithesis, one member of which has to be supplied in each case, and He would teach us that whoever the children of this world may be, they are ‘children of darkness’; and that the ‘children of light’ are so, just because they are the children of another world than this. Thus He limits His praise, because it is the sons of darkness that, in a certain sense, are wiser than the enlightened ones. And that is what makes the wonder and the inconsistency to which our Lord is pointing. We can understand a man being a consistent, thorough-paced fool all through. But men whose folly is so dashed and streaked with wisdom, and others whose wisdom is so spotted and blurred with folly, are the extraordinary paradoxes which experience of life presents to us.

The children of this world are of darkness; the children of light are the children of another world. Now I need not spend more than a sentence or two in further explaining these two antitheses. I do not intend to vindicate them, or to vindicate our Lord’s distinct classification of men into these two halves. What does He mean by the children of this world? The old Hebrew idiom, the children of so-and-so, simply suggests persons who are so fully possessed and saturated with a given quality, or who belong so entirely to a given person, as that they are spoken of as if they stood to it, or to him, in the relation of children to their parents. And a child of this world is a man whose whole thoughts, aims, and objects of life are limited and conditioned by this material

present. But the word which is employed here, translated rightly enough 'world,' is not the same as that which is often used, especially in John's writings, for the same idea. Although it conveys a similar idea, still it is different. The characteristic quality of the visible and material world which is set forth by the expression here employed is its transiency. 'The children of this epoch' rather than 'of this world' is the meaning of the phrase. And it suggests, not so much the inadequacy of the material to satisfy the spiritual, as the absurdity of a man fixing his hopes and limiting his aims and life-purpose within the bounds of what is destined to fade and perish. Fleeting wealth, fleeting honours, mortal loves, wisdom, and studies that pass away with the passing away of the material; these, however elevating some of them may be, however sweet some of them may be, however needful all of them are in their places, are not the things to which a man can safely lash his being, or entrust his happiness, or wisely devote his life. And therefore the men who, ignoring the fact that they live and the world passes, make themselves its slaves, and itself their object, are convicted by the very fact of the disproportion between the duration of themselves and of that which is their aim, of being children of the darkness.

Then we come to the other antithesis. The children of light are so in the measure in which their lives are not dependent exclusively upon, nor directed solely towards, the present order and condition of things. If there be a *this*, then there is a *that*. If there be an age which is qualified as being present, then that implies that there is an age or epoch which is yet to come. And that coming 'age' should regulate the



whole of our relations to that age which at present is. For life is continuous, and the coming epoch is the outcome of the present. As truly as 'the child is father of the man,' so truly is Eternity the offspring of Time, and that which we are to-day determines that which we shall be through the ages. He that recognises the relations of the present and the future, who sees the small, limited things of the moment running out into the dim eternity beyond, and the track unbroken across the gulfs of death and the broad expanse of countless years, and who therefore orders the little things here so as to secure the great things yonder, he, and only he, who has made time the 'lackey to eternity,' and in his pursuit of the things seen and temporal, regards them always in the light of things unseen and eternal, is a child of light.

II. The second consideration suggested here is the limited and relative wisdom of the fools.

The children of this world, who are the children of darkness, and who at bottom are thoroughly unwise, considered relatively, 'are wiser than the children of light.' The steward is the example. 'A rogue is always'—as one of our thinkers puts it—'a roundabout fool.' He would have been a much wiser man if he had been an honest one; and, instead of tampering with his lord's goods, had faithfully administered them.

But, shutting out the consideration of the moral quality of his action, look how much there was in it that was wise, prudent, and worthy of praise. There were courage, fertility of resource, a clear insight into what was the right thing to do. There was a wise adaptation of means to an end. There was promptitude in carrying out the wise means that suggested

themselves to him. The design was bad. Granted. We are not talking about goodness, but about cleverness. So, very significantly, in the parable the person cheated cannot help saying that the cheat was a clever one. The 'lord,' although he had suffered by it, 'commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.'

Did you never know in Manchester some piece of sharp practice, about which people said, 'Ah, well, he is a clever fellow,' and all but condoned the immorality for the sake of the smartness? The lord and the steward belong to the same level of character; and vulpine sagacity, astuteness, and qualities which ensure success in material things seem to both of them to be of the highest value. 'The children of this world, *in their generation*'—but only in it—'are wiser than the children of light.'

Now I draw a very simple, practical lesson, and it is just this, that if Christian men, in their Christian lives, would practise the virtues that the world practises, in pursuit of its shabby aims and ends, their whole Christian character would be revolutionised. Why, a boy will spend more pains in learning to whistle than half of you do in trying to cultivate your Christian character. The secret of success religiously is precisely the same as the secret of success in ordinary things. Look at the splendid qualities that go to the making of a successful housebreaker. Audacity, resource, secrecy, promptitude, persistence, skill of hand, and a hundred others, are put into play before a man can break into your back kitchen and steal your goods. Look at the qualities that go to the making of a successful amuser of people. Men will spend endless time and pains, and devote concentration, persistence,

self-denial, diligence, to learning how to play upon some instrument, how to swing upon a trapeze, how to twist themselves into abnormal contortions. Jugglers and fiddlers, and circus-riders and dancers, and people of that sort spend far more time upon efforts to perfect themselves in their profession, than ninety-nine out of every hundred professing Christians do to make themselves true followers of Jesus Christ. They know that nothing is to be got without working for it, and there is nothing to be got in the Christian life without working for it any more than in any other.

Shut out the end for a moment, and look at the means. From the ranks of criminals, of amusers, and of the purely worldly men of business that we come in contact with every day, we may get lessons that ought to bring a blush to all our cheeks, when we think to ourselves how a wealth of intellectual and moral qualities and virtues, such as we do not bring to bear on our Christian lives, are by these men employed in regard of their infinitely smaller pursuits.

Oh, brethren! we ought to be our own rebukes, for it is not only other people who show forth in other fields of life the virtues that would make so much better Christians of us, if we used them in ours, but that we ourselves carry within ourselves the condemning contrast. Look at your daily life! Do you give anything like the effort to grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, that you do to make or maintain your position in the world? When you are working side by side with the children of this world for the same objects, you keep step with them, and are known to be diligent in business as they are. When you pass into the church, what do you do there? Are we not ice in one half of our lives, and fire in the

other? We may well lay to heart these solemn words of our Lord, and take shame when we think that not only do the unwise, who choose the world as their portion, put us to shame in their self-denial, their earnestness, their absorption, their clear insight into facts, their swiftness in availing themselves of every opportunity, their persistence and their perseverance, but that we rebuke ourselves because of the difference between the earnestness with which we follow the things that are of this world, and the languor of our pursuit after the things that are unseen and eternal.

Of course the reasons for the contrast are easy enough to apprehend, and I do not need to spend time upon them. The objects that so have power to stimulate and to lash men into energy, continuously through their lives, lie at hand, and a candle near will dim the sunshine beyond. These objects appeal to sense, and such make a deeper impression than things that are shown to the mind, as every picture-book may prove to us. And we, in regard to the aims of our Christian life, have to make a continual effort to bring and keep them before us, or they are crowded out by the intrusive vulgarities and dazzling brilliances of the present. And so it comes to pass that the men who hunt after trifles that are to perish set examples to the men who say that they are pursuing eternal realities. 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise.' Go to the men of the world, thou Christian, and do not let it be said that the devil's scholars are more studious and earnest than Christ's disciples.

III. Lastly, note the conclusive folly of the partially wise.

'In their generation,' says Christ; and that is all



that can be said. The circle runs round its 360 degrees, and these people take a segment of it, say forty-five degrees, and all the rest is as non-existent. If I am to call a man a wise man out and out, there are two things that I shall have to be satisfied about concerning him. The one is, what is he aiming at? and the other, how does he aim at it? In regard to the means, the men of the world bear the bell, and carry away the supremacy. Let in the thought of the end, and things change. Two questions reduce all the world's wisdom to stark, staring insanity. The first question is, 'What are you doing it for?' And the second question is, 'And suppose you get it, what then?' Nothing that cannot pass the barrier of these two questions satisfactorily is other than madness, if taken to be the aim of a man's life. You have to look at the end, and the whole circumference of the circle of the human being, before you serve out the epithets of 'wise' and 'foolish.'

I need not dwell on the manifest folly of men who give their lives to aims and ends of which I have already said that they are disproportioned to the capacity of the pursuer. Look at yourselves, brothers; these hearts of yours that need an infinite love for their satisfaction, these active spirits of yours that can never be at rest in creatural perfection; these troubled consciences of yours that stir and moan inarticulately over unperceived wounds until they are healed by Christ. How can any man with a heart and a will, and a progressive spirit and intellect, find what he needs in anything beneath the stars? 'Whose image and superscription hath it? They say unto Him, Cæsar's'; we say 'God's.' 'Render unto God the things that are God's.' The man who makes anything but

God his end and aim is relatively wise and absolutely foolish.

Let me remind you too, that the same sentence of folly passes, if we consider the disproportion between the duration of the objects and of him who makes them his aim. You live, and if you are a wise man, your treasures will be of the kind that last as long as you. 'They call their lands after their own name; they think that their houses shall continue for ever. They go down into the dust. Their glory shall not descend after them,' and, therefore, 'this, their way, is their folly.'

Brethren, all that I would say may be gathered into two words. Let there be a proportion between your aims and your capacity. That signifies, let God be your end. And let there be a correspondence between your end and your means. That signifies, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.' Or else, when everything comes to be squared up and settled, the epitaph on your gravestone will deservedly be: 'Thou fool!'

## TWO KINDS OF RICHES

'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. 11. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12. And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?'—LUKE xvi. 10-12.

THAT is a very strange parable which precedes my text, in which our Lord takes a piece of crafty dishonesty on the part of a steward who had been embezzling his lord's money as in some sense an

example for us Christian people. There are other instances in which He does the same thing, finding a soul of goodness in things evil, as, for instance, in the parable of the Unjust Judge. Similar is the New Testament treatment of war or slavery, both of which diabolical things are taken as illustrations of what in the highest sphere are noble and heavenly things.

But having delivered the parable, our Lord seems, in the verses that I have read, to anticipate the objection that the unfaithfulness of the steward can never be an example for God's stewards; and in the words before us, amongst other things, He says substantially this, that whilst the steward's using his lord's wealth in order to help his lord's debtors was a piece of knavery and unfaithfulness, in us it is not unfaithfulness, but the very acme of faithfulness. In the text we have the thought that there are two kinds of valuable things in the world, a lower and a higher; that men may be very rich in regard to the one, and very poor in regard to the other. In respect to these, 'There is that maketh himself rich, and yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, and yet hath great riches.' More than that, the noblest use of the lower kind of possessions is to secure the possession of the highest. And so He teaches us the meaning of life, and of all that we have.

Now, there are three things in these words to which I would turn your attention—the two classes of treasure, the contrast of qualities between these two, and the noblest use of the lower.

#### I. The Two Classes of Treasure.

Now, we shall make a great mistake if we narrow down the interpretation of that word 'mammon' in the context (which is 'that which is least,' etc., here)

to be merely money. It covers the whole ground of all possible external and material possessions, whatsoever things a man can only have in outward seeming, whatsoever things belong only to the region of sense and the present. All that is in the world, in fact, is included in the one name. And you must widen out your thoughts of what is referred to here in this prolonged contrast which our Lord runs between the two sets of treasures, so as to include, not only money, but all sorts of things that belong to this sensuous and temporal scene. And, on the other hand, there stands opposite to it, as included in, and meant by, that which is 'most,' 'that which is the true riches,' 'that which is your own'; everything that holds of the unseen and spiritual, whether it be treasures of intellect and lofty thought, or whether it be pure and noble aims, or whether it be ideals of any kind, the ideals of art, the aspirations of science, the lofty aims of the scholar and the student—all these are included. And the very same standard of excellence which declares that the treasures of a cultivated intellect, of a pure mind, of a lofty purpose, are higher than the utmost of material good, and that 'wisdom is better than rubies,' the very same standard, when applied in another direction, declares that above the treasures of the intellect and the taste are to be ranked all the mystical and great blessings which are summoned up in that mighty word salvation. And we must take a step further, for neither the treasures of the intellect, the mind, and the heart, nor the treasures of the spiritual life which salvation implies, can be realised and reached unless a man possesses God. So in the deepest analysis, and in the truest understanding of these two contrasted classes of wealth you have but the old antithesis: the



world—and God. He that has God is rich, however poor he may be in reference to the other category; and he that has Him not is poor, however rich he may be. ‘The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places,’ says the Psalmist; and ‘I have a goodly heritage,’ because he could also say, ‘God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.’ So there is the antithesis, the things of time and sense, the whole mass of them knit together on the one hand; the single God alone by Himself on the other. Of these two classes of valuable things our Lord goes on next to tell us the relative worth. For we have here

## II. The Contrast between the Two.

That contrast is threefold, as you observe, ‘that which is least,’ or, perhaps better, ‘that which is very little,’ and ‘that which is much.’ That is a contrast in reference to degree. But degree is a shallow word, which does not cover the whole ground, nor go down to the depths. So our Lord comes next to a contrast in regard to essential nature, ‘the unrighteous mammon’ and ‘the true riches.’ But even these contrasts in degree and in kind do not exhaust all the contrasts possible, for there is another, the contrast in reference to the reality of our possession: ‘that which is another’s’; ‘that which is your own.’ Let us, then, take these three things, the contrast in degree, the contrast in kind, the contrast in regard to real possession.

First, then, and briefly, mental and spiritual and inward blessings, salvation, God, are more than all externals. Our Lord gathers all the conceivable treasures of earth, jewels and gold and dignities, and scenes of sensuous delights, and everything that holds to the visible and the temporal, and piles them into one scale,

and then He puts into the other the one name, God; and the pompous nothings fly up and are nought, and have no weight at all. Is that not true? Does it need any demonstration, any more talk about it? No!

But then comes in sense and appeals to us, and says, 'You cannot get beyond my judgment. These things are good.' Jesus Christ does not say that they are not, but sense regards them as far better than they are. They are near us, and a very small object near us, by the laws of perspective, shuts out a mightier one beyond us. We in Manchester live in a community which is largely based on, and actuated and motivated in its diligence by the lie that material good is better than spiritual good, that it is better to be a rich man and a successful merchant than to be a poor and humble and honest student; that it is better to have a balance at your bankers than to have great and pure and virginal thoughts in a clean heart; that a man has done better for himself when he has made a fortune than when he has God in his heart. And so we need, and God knows it was never more needed in Manchester than to-day, that we should preach and preach and preach, over and over again, this old-fashioned threadbare truth, which is so threadbare and certain that it has lost its power over the lives of many of us, that all that, at its mightiest, is very little, and that this, at its least, is very much. Dear brethren, you and I know how hard it is always, especially how hard it is in business lives, to keep this as our practical working faith. We say we believe, and then we go away and live as if we believed the opposite. I beseech you listen to the scale laid down by Him who knew all things in their measure and degree, and let us settle it in our souls, and live as if we had settled it,

that it is better to be wise and good than to be rich and prosperous, and that God is more than a universe of worlds, if we have Him for our own.

But to talk about a contrast in degree degrades the reality, for it is no matter of difference of measurement, but it is a matter of difference of kind. And so our Lord goes on to a deeper phase of the contrast, when He pits against one another 'the unrighteous mammon' and 'the true riches.' Now, there is some difficulty in that contrast. The two significant terms do not seem to be precise opposites, and possibly they are not intended to be logically accurate counterparts of each other. But what is meant by 'the unrighteous mammon'? I do not suppose that the ordinary explanation of that verse is quite adequate. We usually suppose that by so stigmatising the material good, He means to suggest how hard it is to get it—and you all know that—and how hard it is to keep it, and how hard it is to administer it, without in some measure falling into the sin of unrighteousness. But whilst I dare say that may be the signification intended, if we were to require that the word here should be a full and correct antithesis to the other phrase, 'the true riches,' we should need to suppose that 'unrighteous' here meant that which falsely pretended to be what it was not. And so we come to the contrast between the deceitfulness of earthly good and the substantial reality of the heavenly. Will any fortune, even though it goes into seven figures, save a man from the miseries, the sorrows, the ills that flesh is heir to? Does a great estate make a man feel less desolate when he stands by his wife's coffin? Will any wealth 'minister to a mind diseased'? Will a mountain of material good calm and satisfy a man's soul? You

see faces just as discontented, looking out of carriage windows, as you meet in the street. 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.' There is no proportion between abundance of external good of any kind and happy hearts. We all know that the man who is rich is not happier than the poor man. And I, for my part, believe that the raw material of happiness is very equally distributed through the world, and that it is altogether a hallucination by which a poor man thinks, 'If I were wealthy like that other man, how different my life would be.' No, it would not; you would be the same man. The rich man that fancies that because he is rich he is 'better off,' as they say, than his poor brother, and the poor man who thinks that he would be 'better off' if he were richer than he is now, are the same man turned inside out, so to speak; and common to both of them is that fallacy, that wealth and material good contribute much to the real blessedness and nobleness of the man who happens to own it.

But then, perhaps, we have rather to regard this unrighteous mammon as so designated from another point of view. You will remember that all through the context our Lord has been insisting on the notion of stewardship. And I take it that what He means here is to remind us that whenever we claim any of our possessions, especially our external ones, as our own, we thereby are guilty of defrauding both God and man, and are unrighteous, and it is unrighteous thereby. Stewardship is a word which describes our relation to all that we have. Forget that, and then whatever you have becomes 'the unrighteous mammon.' There is the point in which Christ's teaching joins hands with a great deal of unchristian teaching



in this present day which is called Socialism and Communism. Christianity is not communistic. It asserts as against other men your right of property, but it limits that right by this, that if you interpret your right of property to mean the right to 'do what you like with your own,' ignoring your stewardship to God, and the right of your fellows to share in what you have, then you are an unfaithful steward, and your mammon is unrighteous. And that principle, the true communism of Christianity, has to be worked into modern society in a way that some of us do not dream of, before modern society will be organised on Christian principles. These words of my text are no toothless words which are merely intended to urge Christian people on to a sentimental charity, and to a niggardly distribution of part of their possessions: but they underlie the whole conception of ownership, as the New Testament sets it forth. Wherever the stewardship that we owe to God, and the participation that we owe to men, are neglected in regard to anything that we have, there God's good gifts are perverted and have become 'unrighteous mammon.'

And, then, on the other hand, our Lord sets forth here the contrast in regard to 'the true riches,' which are such, inasmuch as they really correspond to the idea of wealth being a true good to a man, and making him rich to all the intents of bliss. He that has the treasures of a pure mind, of a lofty aim, of a quiet conscience, of a filled and satisfied and therefore calmed heart; he that has the treasure of salvation; he that has the boundless wealth of God—he has the bullion, while the poor rich people that have the material good have the scrip of an insolvent company, which is worth no more than the paper on

which it is written. There are two currencies—one solid metal, the other worthless paper. The one is 'true riches,' and the other the 'unrighteous mammon.'

Then there is a last contrast, and that is with regard to the reality of our possession. On the one hand, that which I fondly call my own is by our Lord stamped with the proprietor's mark, of somebody else, 'that which is Another's.' It was His before He gave it, it was His when He gave it, it is His after He has given it. My name is never to be written on my property so as to erase the name of the Owner. I am a steward; I am a trustee; it all belongs to Him. That is one rendering of this word. But the phrase may perhaps point in another direction. It may suggest how shadowy and unreal, as being merely external, and how transitory is our ownership of wealth and outward possessions. A man says, 'It is mine.' What does he mean by that? It is not his own in any real sense. I get more good out of a rich man's pictures, or estate, if I look at them with an eye that loves them, than he does. The world belongs to the man that can enjoy it and rightly use it. And the man that enjoys it and uses it aright is the man who lives in God. Nothing is really yours except that which has entered into the substance of your soul, and become incorporated with your very being, so that, as in wool dyed in the grain, the colour will never come out. What I am, that I have; what I only have, that, in the deepest sense, I have not. 'Shrouds have no pockets,' says the Spanish proverb. 'His glory will not descend after him,' says the psalm. That is a poor possession which only is outward whilst it lasts, and which ends so soon. But there is wealth that comes into me. There are riches that cannot be parted from me. I can

make my own a great inheritance, which is wrought into the very substance of my being, and will continue so inwrought, into whatsoever worlds or states of existence any future may carry me. So, and only so, is anything my own. Let these contrasts dominate our lives.

I see our space is gone; I must make this sermon a fragment, and leave what I intended to have made the last part of it for possible future consideration. Only let me press upon you in one closing word this, that the durable riches are only found in God, and the riches that can be found in God are brought to every one of us by Him 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,' of goodness and grace. If we will make ourselves poor, by consciousness of our need, and turn with faith to Jesus, then we shall receive from Him those riches which are greatest, which are true, which are our own in that they pass into our very being, in that they were destined for us from all eternity by the love of God; and in having them we shall be rich indeed, and for ever.

### THE GAINS OF THE FAITHFUL STEWARD

'If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?'—LUKE xvi. 12.

IN a recent sermon on this context I dealt mainly with the threefold comparison which our Lord runs between the higher and the lower kind of riches. The one is stigmatised as 'that which is least,' 'the unrighteous mammon,' 'that which is another's'; whilst the higher is magnified as being 'that which is most,' 'the true

riches,' 'your own.' What are these two classes? On the one hand stand all possessions which, in and after possession, remain outside of a man, which may survive whilst he perishes, or perish while he survives. On the other hand are the riches which pass into him, and become inseparable from him. Noble aims, high aspirations, pure thoughts, treasures of wisdom, treasures of goodness—these are the real wealth corresponding to man's nature, destined for his enrichment, and to last with him for ever. But we may gather the whole contrast into two words: the small, the 'unrighteous,' the wealth which being mine is not mine but remains another's, and foreign to me, is the world. The great riches, the 'true riches,' the good destined for me, and for which I am destined, is God. In these two words you have the antithesis, the real antithesis, God *versus* the world.

Now let us turn rather to the principle which our Lord here lays down, in reference to these two classes of good, or of possessions. He tells us that the faithful use of the world helps us to the possession of God; or, to put it into other words, that how we handle money and what money can buy, has a great deal to do with our religious enjoyment and our religious life, and that that is true, both in regard to our partial possession of God here and now, and to our perfect possession of Him in the world to come.

Now I wish to say one or two very plain things about this matter, and I hope that you will not turn away from them because they are familiar and trite. Considering how much of your lives, especially as regards men of business, is taken up with money, its acquisition, its retention, its distribution, there are few things that have more to do with the



vigour or feebleness of your Christian life than the way in which you handle these perishable things.

I wish to say a word or two, first, about

I. What our Lord means by this faithfulness to which He attaches such tremendous issues.

Now, you will remember, that the starting point of my text is that parable of the unjust steward, whose conduct, knavish as it was, is in some sense presented by our Lord to His disciples, and to us, as a pattern. But my text, and the other two verses which are parallel with it, seem to have amongst their other purposes this: to put in a caveat against supposing that it is the unfaithfulness of the steward which is recommended for our imitation. And so the first point that is suggested in regard to this matter of faithfulness about the handling of outward good is that we have to take care that it is rightly acquired, for though the unjust steward was commended for the prudent use that he made of dishonestly acquired gain, it is the prudent use, and not the manner of the acquisition which we are to take as our examples. Initial unfaithfulness in acquisition is not condoned or covered over by any pious and benevolent use hereafter. Mediæval barons left money for masses. Plenty of Protestants do exactly the same thing. Brewers will build cathedrals, and found picture galleries, and men that have made their money foully will fancy that they atone for that by leaving it for some charitable purpose. The caustic but true wit of a Scottish judge said about a great bequest which was supposed to be—whether rightly or wrongly, I know not—of that sort, that it was ‘the heaviest fire insurance premium that had been paid in the memory of man.’ ‘The money does not stink,’ said the Roman Emperor, about the proceeds of

an unsavoury tax. But the money unfaithfully won does stink when it is thrown into God's treasury. 'The price of a dog shall not come into the sanctuary of the Lord.' Do not think that money doubtfully won is consecrated by being piously spent.

But there are more things than that here, for our Lord sums up the whole of a Christian man's duties in regard to the use of this external world and all its good, in that one word 'faithful,' which implies discharge of responsibility, recognition of obligation, the continual consciousness that we are not proprietors but stewards. Unless we carry that consciousness with us into all the phases of our connection with perishable goods they become—as I shall have to show you in a moment,—hindrances instead of helps to our possession of God.

I am not going to talk revolutionary socialism, or anything of that sort, but I am bound to reiterate my own solemn conviction that until, practically as well as theoretically, the Christian Church in all its branches brings into its creed, and brings out in its practice, the great thought of stewardship, especially in regard to material and external good, but also in regard to the durable riches of salvation, the nations will be full of unrest, and thunder-clouds heavily boding storm and destruction will lower on the horizon. What we have, we have that we may impart; what we have in all forms of having, we have because we have received. We are distributing centres, that is all—I was going to say like a nozzle, perforated with many holes, at the end of the spout of a watering-can. That is a Christian man's relation to his possessions. We are stewards. 'It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.'

Now let me ask you to notice—

II. The bearing of this faithfulness in regard to the lower wealth on our possession of the higher.

Jesus says in this context, twice over, that faithfulness with regard to the former is the condition of our being entrusted with the latter. Now, remember, by way of illustration of this thought, what all this outward world of goodness and beauty is mainly meant for. What? It is all but scaffolding by which, and within the area of which, the building may arise. The meaning of the world is to make character. All that we have, aye! and all that we do, and the whole of the events and circumstances with which we come in contact here on earth, are then lifted to their noblest function, and are then understood in their deepest meaning when we look upon them as we do upon the leaping-poles and bars and swings of a gymnasium,—as meant to develop thews and muscles, and make men of us. That is what they are here for, and that is what we are here for. Not enjoyment, and not sorrow, except in so far as these two are powers in developing character, not plunging ourselves in the enjoyments of sense. Wealth and poverty, gain and loss, love gratified and love marred, possessions sweet, when preserved, and possessions that become sweeter by being removed; all these are simply meant as whetstones on which the keen blade may be sharpened, as forces against which, trying ourselves, our deftness and strength may be increased. They are all meant to make us men, and if we faithfully use these externals with a recognition of their source, with a wise estimate of their subordination so as that our desires shall not cleave to them solely, and with a fixed determination to use them as ministers to make ourselves nobler, wiser, stronger,

liker to God and His Christ, then the world will minister to our possession of God, and being 'faithful in that which is least,' we shall thereby be more capable of receiving that which is greatest. But if, on the other hand, we so forget our true wealth, and become so besotted and absorbed in our adhesion to, and our desires after, fleeting good, then the capacities that were noble will fade and shrivel, being unused; aims and purposes that were elevated and pure will die out unsatisfied; windows in our souls which commanded a wide, glorious prospect will gradually be bricked up; burdens which hinder our running will be piled upon our backs, and the world will have conquered us, whilst we are dreaming that we have conquered the world. You look at a sea anemone in a pool on the rocks when the tide is out, all its tendrils outstretched, and its cavity wide open. Some little bit of seaweed, or some morsel of half-putrefying matter, comes in contact with it, and instantly every tentacle is retracted, and the lips are tightly closed, so that you could not push a bristle in. And when your tentacles draw themselves in to clutch the little portion of worldly good, of whatever sort it is, that has come into your hold, there is no room to get God in there, and being 'unfaithful in that which is least' you have made it impossible that you should possess 'that which is most.' Ah! there are some of us that were far better Christians long ago, when we were poorer men, than we are to-day, and there are some of us that know what it is to have the heart so filled with baser liquors that there is no room for the ethereal nectar. If the world has filled my soul, where is God to dwell?

There is another way in which we may look at this matter. I have said that the main use of these perish-



able and fragmentary good things around us is to develop character, by our administration of them. Another way of putting the same thought is that their main use is to show us God. If we faithfully use the lesser good it will become transparent, and reveal to us the greater. We hear a great deal about deepening the spiritual life by prayers, and conventions, and Bible readings and the like. I have no word to say except in full sympathy with all such. But I do believe that the best means, the most powerful means, by which the great bulk of Christian men could deepen their spiritual lives would be a more honest and thorough-going attempt to 'be faithful in that which is least.' We have so much to do with it necessarily, that few, if any, things have more power in shaping our whole characters than our manner of administering the wealth, the material good, that comes to our hands.

And so, dear brethren, I beseech you remember that the laws of perspective are such as that a minute thing near at hand shuts out the vision of a mighty thing far off, and a hillock by my side will hide the Himalayas at a distance, and a sovereign may block out God; and 'that which is least' has the diabolical power of seeming greater to us than, and of obscuring our vision of, 'that which is most.'

May I remind you that all these thoughts about the bearing of faithfulness in administering the lower of our possessions, on the attainment of higher, apply to us whatever be the amount of these outward goods that we have? I suppose there were not twelve poorer men in all Palestine that day than the twelve to whom my text was originally addressed. Three of them had left their nets and their fishing-boats, one of them we know had left his counting-house, as a publican, and

all his receipts and taxes behind him. What they had we know not, but at all events they were the poor of this world. Do not any of you that happen to be modestly or poorly off think that my sermon is a sermon for rich men. It is not what we have, but how we handle it, that is in question. 'The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches,' were bracketed together by Jesus Christ as the things that 'choke the word,' and make it unfruitful. The poor man who wants, and the rich man who uses unfaithfully, are alike hit by the words of my text.

Now, further, let me ask you to look at

III. The bearing of faithfulness in this life on the fuller possession of our true riches in the life hereafter.

There lies under this whole context a striking conception of life here in its relation to the life hereafter. A father sets his son, or a master sets his apprentice, to some small task, an experiment made upon a comparatively worthless body, supplies him with material which it does not much matter whether he spoils or not, and then if by practice the hand becomes deft, he is set to better work. God sets us to try our 'prentice hands here in the world, and if we administer that rightly, not necessarily perfectly, but so as to show that there are the makings of a good workman in us by His gracious help, then the next life comes, with its ampler margin, with its wider possibilities, with its nobler powers, and there we are set to use in loftier fashion the powers which we made our own being here. 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.'

I have said that the great use of the world and all its wealth is to make character. I have said that that

character determines our capacity for the possession of God. I have said that our administration of worldly wealth is one chief factor in determining our character. Now I say that that character persists. There are great changes, changes the significance and the scope and the consequences of which we can never know here. But the man remains, in the main direction of his being, in the character which he has made for himself by his use of God's world and of Christ's Spirit. And so the way in which we handle the trivialities and temporalities here has eternal consequences. We sit in a low room with the telegraph instrument in front of us, and we click off our messages, and they are recorded away yonder, and we shall have to read them one day. Transient causes produce permanent effects. The seas which laid down the great sandstone deposits that make so large a portion of the framework of this world have long since evaporated. But the footprints of the seabird that stalked across the moist sand, and the little pits made by the raindrops that fell countless millenniums ago on the red ooze, are there yet, and you may see them in our museums. And so our faithfulness, or our unfaithfulness, here has made the character which is eternal, and on which will depend whether we shall, in the joys of that future life, possess God in fullness, or whether we shall lose Him, as our portion and our Friend.

Now, dear brethren, do not forget that all this that I have been saying is the second page in Christ's teaching; and the first page is an entirely different one. I have been saying that we make character, and that character determines our possession of God and His grace. But there is another thing to be said. The central thought of Christ's gospel is that God, in His sweetness, in His pardoning mercy, in His cleansing

Spirit, is given to the very men whose characters do not deserve it. And the same Lord who said, 'If ye have not been faithful in that which is least, who shall give you that which is greatest?' says also from the heavens, 'I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.' My text, and the principle that is involved in it, do not contradict the great truth that we are saved by simple faith, however unworthy we are. That is the message to begin with. And unless you have received it you are not standing in the place where the message that I have been insisting upon has a personal bearing on you. But if you have taken Christ for your salvation, remember, Christian brother and sister, that it is not the same thing in regard either to your Christian life on earth, or to your heavenly glory, whether you have been living faithfully as stewards in your handling of earth's perishable good, or whether you have clung to it as your real portion, have used it selfishly, and by it have hidden God from your hearts. To Christian men is addressed the charge that we trust not in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God, and that we be 'rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, that we lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come'; and so 'lay hold on the life that is life indeed.'

## DIVES AND LAZARUS

'There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; 23. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and



Lazarus in his bosom. 24. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. 25. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. 27. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28. For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them lest they also come into this place of torment. 29. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.'—LUKE XVI. 19-31.

THIS, the sternest of Christ's parables, must be closely connected with verses 13 and 14. Keeping them in view, its true purpose is plain. It is meant to rebuke, not the possession of wealth, but its heartless, selfish use. Christ never treats outward conditions as having the power of determining either character or destiny. What a man does with his conditions settles what he is and what becomes of him. Nor does the parable teach that the use of wealth is the only determining factor, but, as every parable must do, it has to isolate the lesson it teaches in order to burn it into the hearers.

There are three parts in the story—the conduct of the rich man, his fate, and the sufficiency of existing warnings to keep us from his sin and his end.

I. Properly speaking, we have here, not a parable—that is, a representation of physical facts which have to be translated into moral or religious truths—but an imaginary narrative, embodying a normal fact in a single case. The rich man does not stand for something else, but is one of the class of which Jesus wishes to set forth the sin and fate. It is very striking that neither he nor the beggar is represented as acting, but each is simply described. The juxtaposition of the two figures carries the whole lesson.

It has sometimes been felt as a difficulty that the one is not said to have done anything bad, nor the other to have been devout or good; and some hasty readers have thought that Jesus was here teaching the communistic doctrine that wealth is sin, and that poverty is virtue. No such crude trash came from His lips. But He does teach that heartless wallowing in luxury, with naked, starving beggars at the gate, is sin which brings bitter retribution. The fact that the rich man does nothing is His condemnation. He was not damned because he had a purple robe and fine linen undergarments, nor because he had lived in abundance, and every meal had been a festival, but because, while so living, he utterly ignored Lazarus, and used his wealth only for his own gratification. Nothing more needs to be said about his character; the facts sufficiently show it.

Still less needs to be said about that of Lazarus. In this part of the narrative he comes into view simply as the means of bringing out the rich man's heartlessness and self-indulgence. For the purposes of the narrative his disposition was immaterial; for it is not our duty to help only deserving or good people. Manhood and misery are enough to establish the right to sympathy and succour. There may be a hint of character in the name 'Lazarus,' which probably means 'God is help.' Since this is the only name in the parables, it is natural to give it significance, and it most likely suggests that the beggar clung to God as his stay. It may glance, too, at the riddle of life, which often seems to mock trust by continued trouble. Little outward sign had Lazarus of divine help, yet he did not cast away his confidence. No doubt, he sometimes got some crumbs from Dives' table, but not from Dives. That the dogs

licked his sores does not seem meant as either alleviation or aggravation, but simply as vividly describing his passive helplessness and utterly neglected condition. Neither he nor any one drove them off.

But the main point about him is that he was at Dives' gate, and therefore thrust before Dives' notice, and that he got no help. The rich man was not bound to go and hunt for poor people, but here was one pushed under his nose, as it were. Translate that into general expressions, and it means that we all have opportunities of beneficence laid in our paths, and that our guilt is heavy if we neglect these. 'The poor ye have always with you.' The guilt of selfish use of worldly possessions is equally great whatever is the amount of possessions. Doing nothing when Lazarus lies at our gate is doing great wickedness. These truths have a sharp edge for us as well as for the 'Pharisees who were covetous'; and they are wofully forgotten by professing Christians.

II. In the second part of the narrative, our Lord follows the two, who had been so near each other and yet so separated, into the land beyond the grave. It is to be especially noticed that, in doing so, He adopts the familiar Rabbinical teaching as to Hades. He does not thereby stamp these conceptions of the state of the dead with His assent; for the purpose of the narrative is not to reveal the secrets of that land, but to impress the truth of retribution for the sin in question. It would not be to a group of Pharisaic listeners that He would have unveiled that world.

He takes their own notions of it—angel bearers, Abraham's bosom, the two divisions in Hades, the separation, and yet communication, between them. These are Rabbis' fancies, not Christ's revelations. The

truths which He wished to force home lie in the highly imaginative conversation between the rich man and Abraham, which also has its likeness in many a Rabbinical legend.

The difference between the ends of the two men has been often noticed, and lessons, perhaps not altogether warranted, drawn from it. But it seems right to suppose that the omission of any notice of the beggar's burial is meant to bring out that the neglect and pitilessness, which had let him die, left his corpse unburied. Perhaps the dogs that had licked his sores tore his flesh. A fine sight that would be from the rich man's door! The latter had to die too, for all his purple, and to be swathed in less gorgeous robes. His funeral is mentioned, not only because pomp and ostentation went as far as they could with him, but to suggest that he had to leave them all behind. 'His glory shall not descend after him.'

The terrible picture of the rich man's torments solemnly warns us of the necessary end of a selfish life such as his. The soul that lives to itself does not find satisfaction even here; but, when all externals are left behind, it cannot but be in torture. That is not drapery. Character makes destiny, and to live to self is death. Observe, too, that the relative positions of Dives and Lazarus are reversed—the beggar being now the possessor of abundance and delights, while the rich man is the sufferer and the needy.

Further note that the latter now desires to have from the former the very help which in life he had not given him, and that the retribution for refusing succour here is its denial hereafter. There had been no sharing of 'good things' in the past life, but the rich man had asserted his exclusive rights to them. They had been



'thy good things' in a very sinful sense, and Lazarus had been left to carry his evil things alone. There shall be no communication of good now. Earth was the place for mutual help and impartation. That world affords no scope for it; for there men reap what they have sown, and each character has to bear its own burden.

Finally, the ineffaceableness of distinctions of character, and therefore of destiny, is set forth by the solemn image of the great gulf which cannot be crossed. It is indeed to be remembered that our Lord is speaking of 'the intermediate state,' before resurrection and final judgment, and that, as already remarked, the intention of the narrative is not to reveal the mysteries of the final state. But still the impression left by the whole is that life here determines life hereafter, and that character, once set and hardened here, cannot be cast into the melting-pot and remoulded there.

III. The last part of the narrative teaches that the fatal sin of heartless selfishness is inexcusable. The rich man's thought for his brethren was quite as much an excuse for himself. He thought that, if he had only known, things would have been different. He shifts blame from himself on to the insufficiency of the warnings given him. And the two answers put into Abraham's mouth teach the sufficiency of 'Moses and the prophets,' little as these say about the future, and the impossibility of compelling men to listen to a divine message to which they do not wish to listen.

The fault lies, not in the deficiency of the warnings, but in the aversion of the will. No matter whether it is Moses or a spirit from Hades who speaks, if men do not wish to hear, they will not hear. They will not be persuaded—for persuasion has as much, or more, to do

with the heart and inclination than with the head. We have as much witness from heaven as we need. The worst man knows more of duty than the best man does. Dives is in torments because he lived for self; and he lived for self, not because he did not know that it was wrong, but because he did not choose to do what he knew to be right.

## MEMORY IN ANOTHER WORLD

'Abraham said, Son, remember!'—LUKE xvi. 25.

It is a very striking thought that Christ, if He be what we suppose Him to be, knew all about the unseen present which we call the future, and yet was all but silent in reference to it. Seldom is it on His lips at all. Of arguments drawn from another world He has very few. Sometimes He speaks about it, but rather by allusion than in anything like an explicit revelation. This parable out of which my text is taken, is perhaps the most definite and continuous of His words about the invisible world; and yet all the while it lay there before Him; and standing on the very verge of it, with it spread out clear before His gaze, He reads off but a word or two of what He sees, and then shuts it in in darkness, and says to us, in the spirit of a part of this parable, 'You have Moses and the prophets—hear them: if these are not enough, it will not be enough for you if all the glories of heaven and all the ghastliness of hell are flashed and flamed before you.' We, too, if we are to 'prophesy according to the proportion of faith,' must not leave out altogether references to a future life in its two departments, and such motives as may

be based upon them; only, I think, we ought always to keep them in the same relative amount to the whole of our teaching in which Christ kept them.

This parable, seeing that it is a parable, of course cannot be trusted as if it were a piece of simple dogmatic revelation, to give us information, facts, so as to construct out of it a theory of the other world. We are always in the double danger in parables, of taking that for drapery which was meant to be essence, and taking that for essence which was meant to be drapery. And so I do not profess to read from this narrative any very definite and clear knowledge of the future; but I think that in the two words which I have ventured to take as a text, we get the basis of very impressive thoughts with regard to the functions of memory in another world.

‘Son, remember!’ It is the voice, the first voice, the perpetual voice, which meets every man when he steps across the threshold of earth into the presence chamber of eternity. All the future is so built upon and interwoven with the past, that for the saved and for the lost alike this word might almost be taken as the motto of their whole situation, as the explanation of their whole condition. Memory in another world is indispensable to the gladness of the glad, and strikes the deepest note in the sadness of the lost. There can be no need to dwell at any length on the simple introductory thought, that there must be memory in a future state. Unless there were remembrance, there could be no sense of individuality. A man cannot have any conviction that he is himself, but by constant, though often unconscious, operation of this subtle act of remembrance. There can be no sense of personal identity except in proportion as there is clearness of recollection. Then again,

if that future state be a state of retribution, there must be memory. Otherwise, there might be joy, and there might be sorrow, but the why and the wherefore of either would be entirely struck out of a man's consciousness, and the one could not be felt as reward, nor the other as punishment. If, then, we are to rise from the grave the same men that we are laid in it, and if the future life has this for its characteristic, that it is a state either of recompense and reward, or of retribution and suffering, then, for both, the clearness and constant action of memory are certainly needed. But it is not to the simple fact of its existence that I desire to direct your attention now. I wish, rather, to suggest to you one or two modifications under which it must apparently work in another world. When men remember *there*, they will remember very differently from the way in which they remember *here*. Let us look at these changes—constituting it, on the one hand, an instrument of torture; and, on the other, a foundation of all our gladness.

I. First, in another state, memory will be so widened as to take in the whole life.

We believe that what a man is in this life, he is more in another, that tendencies here become results yonder, that his sin, that his falsehood, that his whole moral nature, be it good or bad, becomes there what it is only striving to be here. We believe that in this present life our capacities of all sorts are hedged in, thwarted, damped down, diluted, by the necessity which there is for their working through this material body of ours. We believe that death is the heightening of a man's stature—if he be bad, the intensifying of his badness; if he be good, the strengthening of his goodness. We believe that the contents of the intellectual nature, the capacities of that nature



also, are all increased by the fact of having done with earth and having left the body behind. It is, I think, the teaching of common-sense, and it is the teaching of the Bible. True, that for some, that growth will only be a growth into greater power of feeling greater sorrow. Such an one grows up into a Hercules; but it is only that the Nessus shirt may wrap round him more tightly, and may gnaw him with a fiercer agony. But whether saved or lost—he that dies is greater than when yet living; and all his powers are intensified and strengthened by that awful experience of death and by what it brings with it.

Memory partakes in the common quickening. There are not wanting analogies and experiences in our present life to let us see that, in fact, when we talk about forgetting we ought to mean nothing more than the temporary cessation of conscious remembrance. Everything which you do leaves its effect with you for ever, just as long-forgotten meals are in your blood and bones to-day. Every act that a man performs is there. It has printed itself upon his soul, it has become a part of himself: and though, like a newly painted picture, after a little while the colours sink in, why is that? Only because they have entered into the very fibre of the canvas, and have left the surface because they are incorporated with the substance, and they want but a touch of varnish to flash out again! We forget *nothing*, in the sense of not being able, some time or another, to recall it; we forget *much* in the sense of ceasing for a time to have it in our thoughts.

For we know, in our own case, how strangely there come swimming up before us, out of the depths of the dim waters of oblivion—as one has seen some bright shell drawn from the sunless sea-caves, and gleaming

white and shapeless far down before we had it on the surface—past thoughts, we know not whence or how. Some one of the million of hooks, with which all our life is furnished, has laid hold of some subtle suggestion which has been enough to bring them up into consciousness. We said we had forgotten them. What does it mean? Only that they had sunk into the deep, beneath our consciousness, and lay there to be brought up when needful. There is nothing more strange than the way in which some period of my life, that I supposed to be an entire blank—if I will think about it for a little while, begins to glimmer into form. As the developing solution brings out the image on the photographic plate, so the mind has the strange power, by fixing the attention, as we say (a short word which means a long, mysterious thing) upon that past that is half-remembered and half-forgotten, of bringing it into clear consciousness and perfect recollection. And, there are instances, too, of a still more striking kind, familiar to some of us how in what people call morbid states, men remember their childhood, which they had forgotten for long years. You may remember that old story of the dying woman beginning to speak in a tongue unknown to all that stood around her bed. When a child she had learned some northern language, in a far-off land. Long before she had learned to shape any definite remembrances of the place, she had been taken away, and not having used, had forgotten the speech. But at last there rushed up again all the old memories, and the tongue of the dumb was loosed, and she spake! People would say, 'the action of disease.' It may be, but that explains nothing. Perhaps in such states the spirit is working in a manner less limited by the body than in health, and so showing some slight prelude of its powers when

it has shuffled off this mortal coil. But be that as it may, these morbid phenomena, and the other more familiar facts already referred to, unite to show us that the sphere of recollection is much wider than that occupied at any given moment by memory. Recollection is the servant of Memory, as our great poet tells us in his wise allegory, and

‘does on him still attend,  
To reach whenever he for ought does send.’

We cannot lay aside anything that we have ever done or been so utterly but that that servant can find it and bring it to his lord. We forget nothing so completely but that we shall be able to recall it. Of that awful power we may say, without irreverence, ‘Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.’

The fragmentary remembrances which we have now, lift themselves above the ocean of forgetfulness like islands in some Archipelago, the summits of sister hills, though separated by the estranging sea that covers their converging sides and the valleys where their roots unite. The solid land is there, though hidden. Drain off the sea, and there will be no more isolated peaks, but continuous land. In this life we have but the island memories heaving themselves into sight, but in the next the Lord shall ‘cause the sea to go back by the breath of His mouth,’ and the channels of the great deep of a human heart’s experiences and actions shall be laid bare. ‘There shall be no more sea’; but the solid land of a whole life will appear when God says, ‘Son, remember!’

So much, then, for my first consideration—namely, that memory in a future state will comprehend the

whole of life. Another thing is, that memory in a future state will probably be so rapid as to embrace all the past life at once. We do not know, we have no conception of, the extent to which our thinking, and feeling, and remembrance, are made tardy by the slow vehicle of this bodily organisation in which the soul rides. But we have in our own lives instances enough to make us feel that there lie in us dormant, mysterious powers by which the rapidity of all our operations of thought and feeling will be enhanced marvellously, like the difference between a broad-wheeled waggon and an express train! At some turning point of your life, when some great joy flashed, or some great shadow darkened upon you all at once; when some crisis that wanted an instantaneous decision appeared—why, what regions of thought, purpose, plan, resolution; what wilderness of desolate sorrow, and what paradises of blooming gladness, your soul has gone through in a moment. Well, then, take another illustration: A sleeper, feeling a light finger laid upon his shoulder, does not know what it is; in an instant he awakes and says, ‘Is it you?’ but between that touch and that word there may be a whole life run through, a whole series of long events dreamt and felt. As on the little retina of an eye there can be painted on a scale inconceivably minute, every tree and mountain-top in the whole wide panorama—so, in an instant, one may run through almost a whole lifetime of mental acts. Then, again, you remember that illustration, often used on this subject, about the experience of those who have been brought face to face with sudden death, and escaped it. The drowning man, when he comes to himself, tells us, that in the interval betwixt the instant when he felt he was going and the passing away of



consciousness, all his life stood before him; as if some flash in a dark midnight had lighted up a whole mountain country—there it all was! Ah, brethren! we know nothing yet about the rapidity with which we may gather before us a whole series of events; so that although we have to pass from one to another, the succession may be so swift, as to produce in our own minds the effect of all being co-existent and simultaneous. As the child flashing about him a bit of burning stick, may seem to make a circle of flame, because the flame-point moves so quickly—so memory, though it does go from point to point, and dwells for some inconceivably minute instant on each part of the remembrance, may yet be gifted with such lightning speed, with such rapidity and awful quickness of glance, as that to the man himself the effect shall be that his whole life is spread out there before him in one instant, and that he, Godlike, sees the end and the beginning side by side. Yes; from the mountain of eternity we shall look down, and behold the whole plain spread before us. Down here we get lost and confused in the devious valleys that run off from the roots of the hills everywhere, and we cannot make out which way the streams are going, and what there is behind that low shoulder of hill yonder: but when we get to the summit peak, and look down, it will all shape itself into one consistent whole, and we shall see it all at once. The memory shall be perfect—perfect in the range of its grasp, and perfect in the rapidity with which it brings up all its objects before us at every instant.

Once more: it seems as if, in another world, memory would not only contain the whole life, and the whole life simultaneously; but would perpetually attend or haunt us. A constant remembrance! It does not lie

in our power even in this world, to decide very much whether we shall remember or forget. It does not come within a man's will to forget or to remember. He cannot say, 'I will remember'; for if he could, he would have remembered already. He cannot say, 'I will forget'; for the very effort fixes his attention on the obnoxious thing. All that we can do, when we seek to remember, is to wander back to somewhere about that point in our life where the shy thing lurks, and hope to catch some sight of it in the leafy coverts: and all we can do, when we want to forget, is to try and fill our mind with other subjects, and in the distractions of them to lose the oppressive and burdensome thoughts. But we know that that is but a partial remedy, that we cannot succeed in doing it. There are presences that will not be put by. There are memories that *will* start up before us, whether we are willing or not. Like the leprosy in the Israelite's house, the foul spot works its way out through all the plaster and the paint; and the house is foul because *it* is there. Oh, my friend! you are a happy and a singular man if there is nothing in your life that you have tried to bury, and the obstinate thing *will* not be buried, but meets you again when you come away from its fancied grave. I remember an old castle where they tell us of a foul murder committed in a vaulted chamber with a narrow window, by torchlight one night; and there, they say, there are the streaks and stains of blood on the black oak floor; and they have planed, and scrubbed, and planed again, and thought they were gone—but there they always *are*, and continually up comes the dull reddish-black stain, as if oozing itself out through the boards to witness to the bloody crime again! The superstitious fable is a type of the way in which

a foul thing, a sinful and bitter memory—gets ingrained into a man's heart. He tries to banish it, and gets rid of it for a while. He goes back again, and the spots are there, and will be there for ever; and the only way to get rid of them is to destroy the soul in which they are.

Memory is not all within the power of the will on earth: and probably, memory in another world is still more involuntary and still more constant. Why? Because I read in the Bible that there is work in another world for God's servants to do; but I do not read that there is work for anybody else but God's servants to do. The work of an unforgiven sinner is done when he dies, and that not only because he is going into the state of retribution, but because no rebel's work is going to be suffered in that world. The time for that is past. And so, if you will look, all the teachings of the Bible about the future state of those who are not in blessedness, give us this idea—a monotonous continuance of idleness, shutting them up to their own contemplations, the memories of the past and the agonies of the future. There are no distractions for such a man in another world. He has thought, he has conscience, he has remembrance. He has a sense of pain, of sin, of wrong, of loss. He has one 'passive fixed endurance, all eternal and the same'; but I do not read that his pain is anodyned and his sorrow soothed by any activity that his hand finds to do. And, in a most tragic sense, we may say, 'there is neither work, nor labour, nor device,' in that dark world where the fruits of sin are reaped in monotonous suffering and ever-present pain. A memory, brethren, that *will* have its own way—what a field for sorrow and lamentation that is, when God

says at last, 'Now go—go apart; take thy life with thee; read it over; see what thou hast done with it!' One old Roman tyrant had a punishment in which he bound the dead body of the murdered to the living body of the murderer, and left them there scaffolded. And when that voice comes, 'Son, remember!' to the living soul of the godless, unbelieving, impenitent man, there is bound to him the murdered past, the dead past, his own life; and, in Milton's awful and profound words,

' Which way I fly is hell—myself am hell ! '

There is only one other modification of this awful faculty that I would remind you of; and that is, that in a future life memory will be associated with a perfectly accurate knowledge of the consequences and a perfectly sensitive conscience as to the criminality of the past. You will have cause and consequence put down before you, meeting each other at last. There will be no room then to say, 'I wonder how such and such a thing will work out,' 'I wonder how such a thing can have come upon me'; but every one will have his whole life to look back upon, and will see the childish sin that was the parent of the full-grown vice, and the everlasting sorrow that came out of that little and apparently transitory root. The conscience, which here becomes hardened by contact with sin, and enfeebled because unheeded, will then be restored to its early sensitiveness and power, as if the labourer's horny palm were to be endowed again with the softness of the infant's little hand. If you will take and think about that, brother, *there is enough*—without any more talk, without any more ghastly, sensual external figures—*there is enough* to make the boldest



tremble; a memory embracing all the past, a memory rapidly grasping and constantly bringing its burden, a judgment which admits of no mistakes, and a conscience which has done with palliations and excuses!

It is not difficult to see how that is an instrument of torture. It is more difficult to see how such a memory can be a source of gladness; and yet it can. The old Greeks were pressed with that difficulty: they said to themselves, If a man remembers, there can be no Elysium for him. And so they put the river of forgetfulness, the waters of Lethe, betwixt life and the happy plains. Ah, *we* do not want any river of oblivion betwixt us and everlasting blessedness. Calvary is on this side, and that is enough! Certainly it is one of the most blessed things about 'the faith that is in Christ Jesus,' that it makes a man remember his own sinfulness with penitence, not with pain—that it makes the memory of past transgressions full of solemn joy, because the memory of *past* transgressions but brings to mind the depth and rushing fullness of that river of love which has swept them all away as far as the east is from the west. Oh, brother, brother! you cannot forget your sins; but it lies within your own decision whether the remembrance shall be thankfulness and blessedness, or whether it shall be pain and loss for ever. Like some black rock that heaves itself above the surface of a sunlit sea, and the wave runs dashing over it, and the spray, as it falls down its sides, is all rainbowed and lightened, and there comes beauty into the mighty grimness of the black thing;—so a man's transgressions rear themselves up, and God's great love, coming sweeping itself against them and over them, makes out of the sin an occasion for the flashing

more brightly of the beauty of His mercy, and turns the life of the pardoned penitent into a life of which even the sin is not pain to remember. So, then, lay your hand upon Christ Jesus. Put your heart into His keeping. Go to Him with your transgressions, He will forget them, and make it possible for you to remember them in such a way that the memory will become to you the very foundation of all your joy, and will make heaven's anthem deeper and more harmonious when you say, 'Now unto Him that hath washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, unto Him be glory for ever and ever!' And, on the other hand, *if not*, then, 'Son, remember!' will be the word that begins the future retribution, and shuts you up with a wasted past, with a gnawing conscience, and an upbraiding heart: to say,

'I backward cast my ee  
On prospects drear!  
And forward, though I canna see,  
I guess and fear!'

## GOD'S SLAVES

'Doth He thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.'—LUKE xvii. 9-10.

THERE are two difficulties about these words. One is their apparent entire want of connection with what precedes—viz., the disciples' prayer, 'Lord, increase our faith,' and the other is the harshness and severity of tone which marks them, and the view of the less attractive side of man's relation to God which is thrown into prominence in them. He must be a

very churlish master who never says 'Thank you,' however faithful his servant's obedience may be. And he must be a very inconsiderate master, who has only another kind of duty to lay upon the shoulders of the servant that has come in after a long day's ploughing and feeding of cattle. Perhaps, however, the one difficulty clears away the other, and if we keep firm hold of the thought that the words of my text, and those which are associated with them, are an answer to the prayer, 'Lord, increase our faith,' the stern and somewhat repelling characteristics of the words may somewhat change.

I. So I look, first, at the husk of apparent harshness and severity. The relation between master and hired servant is not the one that is in view, but the relation between a master and the slave who is his property, who has no rights, who has no possessions, whose life and death and everything connected with him are at the absolute disposal of his master. It is a foul and wicked relation when existing between men, and it has been full of cruelty and atrocities. But Jesus Christ lays His hand upon it, and says, 'That is the relation between men and God; that is the relation between men and Me.'

And what is involved therein? Absolute authority; so that the slave is but, as it were, an animated instrument in the hand of the master, with no will of his own, and no rights and no possessions. That is not all of our relation to God, blessed be His Name! But that is *in* our relation to Him, and the highest title that a man can have is the title which the Apostles in after days bound upon their foreheads as a crown of honour—'A slave of Jesus Christ.'

Then, if that relation is laid as being the basis of all

our connection with God, whatever else there may be also involved, these two things which in the human relation are ugly and inconsiderate, and argue a very churlish and selfish nature on the part of the human master, belong essentially to our relation to God. 'Which of you, having a servant, ploughing or feeding cattle, will say unto him . . . when he has come from the field, Go (immediately) and sit down to meat, and will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken: and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?' You will get your supper by-and-by, but you are here to work, says the master, and when you have finished one task, that does not involve that you are to rest; it involves only that you are to take up another. And however wearisome has been the ploughing amongst the heavy clods all day long, and tramping up and down the furrows, when you come in you are to clean yourself up, and get my supper ready, 'and afterward thou shalt eat and drink.'

As I have said, such a speech would argue a harsh human master, but is there not a truth which is not harsh in it in reference to us and God? Duty never ends. The eternal persistence through life of the obligation to service is what is taught us here, as being inherent in the very relation between the Lord and Owner of us all and us His slaves. Moralists and irreligious teachers say grand things about the eternal sweep of the great law of duty. The Christian thought is the higher one, 'Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me,' and wherever I am I am under obligation to serve Thee, and no past record of work absolves me from the work of the



present. From the cradle to the grave I walk beneath an all-encompassing, overarching firmament of duty. As long as we draw breath we are bound to the service of Him whose slaves we are, and whose service is perfect freedom.

Such is the bearing of this apparently repulsive representation of our text, which is not so repulsive if you come to think about it. It does not in the least set aside the natural craving for recreation and relaxation and repose. It does not overlook God's obligation to keep His slave alive, and in good condition for doing His work, by bestowing upon him the things that are needful for him, but it does meet that temptation which comes to us all to take that rest which circumstances may make manifestly not God's will, and it says to us, 'Forget the things that are behind, and reach forth unto the things that are before.' You have done a long day's work with plough or sheep-crook. The reward for work is more work. Come away indoors now, and nearer the Master, prepare His table. 'Which of you, having a servant, will not do so with him?' And that is how He does with us.

Then, the next thought here, which, as I say, has a harsh exterior, and a bitter rind, is that one of the slave doing his work, and never getting so much as 'thank you' for it. But if you lift this interpretation too, into the higher region of the relation between God and His slaves down here, a great deal of the harshness drops away. For what does it come to? Just to this, that no man among us, by any amount or completeness of obedience to the will of God establishes claims on God for a reward. You have done your duty—so much the better for you, but is that any reason why you should be decorated

and honoured for doing it? You have done no more than your duty. 'So, likewise, ye, when ye have done all things that are commanded you'—even if that impossible condition were to be realised—'say we are unprofitable servants'; not in the bad sense in which the word is sometimes used, but in the accurate sense of not having brought any profit or advantage, more than was His before, to the Master whom we have thus served. It is a blessed thing for a man to call *himself* an unprofitable servant; it is an awful thing for the Master to call him one. If *we* say 'we are unprofitable servants,' we shall be likely to escape the solemn words from the Lord's lips: 'Take ye away the unprofitable servant, and cast him into outer darkness.' There are two that may use the word, Christ the Judge, and man the judged, and if the man will use it, Christ will not. 'If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged.'

Now, although, as I have said about the other part of this text, it is not meant to exhaust our relations to God, or to say the all-comprehensive word about the relation of obedience to blessedness; it is meant to say

' Merit lives from man to man,  
And not from man, O Lord! to Thee.'

No one can reasonably build upon his own obedience, or his own work, nor claim as by right, for reward, heaven or other good. So my text is the anticipation of Paul's teaching about the impossibility of a man's being saved by his works, and it cuts up by the root, not only the teaching as to a treasure of 'merits of the saints,' and 'works of supererogation,' and the like; but it tells us, too, that we must beware of the germs of that self-complacent way of looking at our-

selves and our own obedience, as if they had anything at all to do with our buying either the favour of God, or the rewards of the faithful servant.

II. Now, all that I have been saying may sound very harsh. Let us take a second step, and try if we can find out the kernel of grace in the harsh husk.

I hold fast by the one clue that Jesus Christ is here replying to the Apostle's prayer, 'Lord, increase our faith.' He had been laying down some very hard regulations for their conduct, and, naturally, when they felt how difficult it would be to come within a thousand miles of what He had been bidding them, they turned to Him with that prayer. It suggests that faith is there, in living operation, or they would not have prayed to Him for its increase. And how does He go about the work of increasing it? In two ways, one of which does not enter into my present subject. First, by showing the disciples the power of faith, in order to stimulate them to greater effort for its possession. He promised that they might say to the fig tree, 'Be thou plucked up and planted in the sea,' and it should obey them. The second way was by this context of which I am speaking now. How does it bear upon the Apostles' prayer? What is there in this teaching about the slave and his master, and the slave's work, and the incompatibility of the notion of reward with the slave's service, to help to strengthen faith? There is this that this teaching beats down every trace of self-confidence, and if we take it in and live by it, makes us all feel that we stand before God, whatever have been our deeds of service, with no claims arising from any virtue or righteousness of our own. We come empty-handed. If the servant who has done all that is commanded has yet to say, 'I can ask

nothing from Thee, because I have done it, for it was all in the line of my duty,' what are we to say, who have done so little that was commanded, and so much that was forbidden?

So, you see, the way to increased faith is not by any magical communication from Christ, as the Apostles thought, but by taking into our hearts, and making operative in our lives, the great truth that in us there is nothing that can make a claim upon God, and that we must cast ourselves, as deserving nothing, wholly into His merciful hands, and find ourselves held up by His great unmerited love. Get the bitter poison root of self-trust out of you, and then there is some chance of getting the wholesome emotion of absolute reliance on Him into you. Jesus Christ, if I might use a homely metaphor, in these words pricks the bladder of self-confidence which we are apt to use to keep our heads above water. And it is only when it is pricked, and we, like the Apostle, feel ourselves beginning to sink, that we fling out a hand to Him, and clutch at His outstretched hand, and cry, 'Lord, save me, I perish!' One way to increase our faith is to be rooted and grounded in the assurance that duty is perennial, and that our own righteousness establishes no claim whatever upon God.

III. Finally, we note the higher view into which, by faith, we come.

I have been saying, with perhaps vain repetition, that the words of our text and context do not exhaust the whole truth of man's relation to God. They do exhaust the truth of the relation of God to any man that has not faith in his heart, because such a man is a slave in the worst sense, and any obedience that he renders to God's will externally is the obedience of a reluctant



will, and is hard and harsh, and there is no end *to* it, and no good *from* it. But if we accept the position, and recognise our own impotence, and non-desert, and humbly say, 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saves us,' then we come into a large place. The relation of master and slave does not cover all the ground *then*. 'Henceforth, I call you not slaves, but friends.' And when the wearied slave comes into the house, the new task is not a new burden, for he is a son as well as a slave; but the work is a delight, and it is a joy to have something more to do for his Father. If our service is the service of sons, sweetened by love, then there will be abundant thanks from the Father, who is not only our owner, but our lover.

For Christian service—that is to say, service based upon faith and rendered in love—*does* minister delight to our Father in heaven, and He Himself has called it an 'odour of a sweet smell, acceptable unto God.' And if our service on earth has been thus elevated and transformed from the compulsory obedience of a slave to the joyful service of a son, then our reception when at sundown the plough is left in the furrow and we come into the house will be all changed too. 'Which of you, having a servant, will say to him, Go and sit down to meat, and will not rather say to him, Make ready whilst I eat and drink?' That is the law for earth, but for heaven it is this, 'Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching. Verily, I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.' The husk is gone now, I think, and the kernel is left. Loving service is beloved by God, and rewarded by the ministering, as a servant

of servants, to us by Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

'Lord, increase our faith,' that we may so serve Thee on earth, and so be served by Thee in heaven.

## WHERE ARE THE NINE?

'And it came to pass, as He went to Jerusalem, that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12. And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 13. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14. And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 15. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16. And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? 18. There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19. And He said unto him, Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.'—LUKE xvii. 11-19.

THE melancholy group of lepers, met with in one of the villages on the borders of Samaria and Galilee, was made up of Samaritans and Jews, in what proportion we do not know. The common misery drove them together, in spite of racial hatred, as, in a flood, wolves and sheep will huddle close on a bit of high ground. Perhaps they had met in order to appeal to Jesus, thinking to move Him by their aggregated wretchedness; or possibly they were permanently segregated from others, and united in a hideous fellowship.

I. We note the lepers' cry and the Lord's strange reply. Of course they had to stand afar off, and the distance prescribed by law obliged them to cry aloud, though it must have been an effort, for one symptom of leprosy is a hoarse whisper. Sore need can momentarily give strange physical power. Their cry indicates some knowledge. They knew the Lord's name, and had dim notions of His authority, for He is addressed

as Jesus and as Master. They knew that He had power to heal, and they hoped that He had 'mercy,' which they might win for themselves by entreaty. There was the germ of trust in the cry forced from them by desperate need. But their conceptions of Him, and their consciousness of their own necessities, did not rise above the purely physical region, and He was nothing to them but a healer.

Still, low and rude as their notions were, they did present a point of contact for Christ's 'mercy,' which is ever ready to flow into every heart that is lowly, as water will into all low levels. Jesus seems to have gone near to the lepers, for it was 'when He saw,' not when He heard, them that He spoke. It did not become Him to 'cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street,' nor would He cure as from afar, but He approaches those whom He heals, that they may see His face, and learn by it His compassion and love. His command recognised and honoured the law, but its main purpose, no doubt, was to test, and thereby to strengthen, the leper's trust. To set out to the priest while they felt themselves full of leprosy would seem absurd, unless they believed that Jesus could and would heal them. He gives no promise to heal, but asks for reliance on an implied promise. He has not a syllable of sympathy; His tender compassion is carefully covered up. He shuts down, as it were, the lantern-slide, and not a ray gets through. But the light was behind the screen all the while. We, too, have sometimes to act on the assumption that Jesus has granted our desires, even while we are not conscious that it is so. We, too, have sometimes to set out, as it were, for the priests, while we still feel the leprosy.

II. We note the healing granted to obedient faith. The whole ten set off at once. They had got all they wanted from the Lord, and had no more thought about Him. So they turned their backs on Him. How strange it must have been to feel, as they went along, the gradual creeping of soundness into their bones! How much more confidently they must have stepped out, as the glow of returning health asserted itself more and more! The cure is a transcendent, though veiled, manifestation of Christ's power; for it is wrought at a distance, without even a word, and with no vehicle. It is simply the silent forth-putting of His power. 'He spake, and it was done' is much, for only a word which is divine can affect matter. But 'He willed, and it was done,' is even more.

III. We note the solitary instance of thankfulness. The nine might have said, 'We are doing what the Healer bade us do; to go back to Him would be disobedience.' But a grateful heart knows that to express its gratitude is the highest duty, and is necessary for its own relief. How like us all it is to hurry away clutching our blessings, and never cast back a thought to the giver! This leper's voice had returned to Him, and his 'loud' acknowledgments were very different from the strained croak of his petition for healing. He knew that he had two to thank—God and Jesus; he did not know that these two were one. His healing has brought him much nearer Jesus than before, and now he can fall at His feet. Thankfulness knits us to Jesus with a blessed bond. Nothing is so sweet to a loving heart as to pour itself out in thanks to Him.

'And he was a Samaritan.' That may be Luke's main reason for telling the story, for it corresponds to



the universalistic tendency of his Gospel. But may we not learn the lesson that the common human virtues are often found abundantly in nations and individuals against whom we are apt to be deeply prejudiced? And may we not learn another lesson—that heretics and heathen may often teach orthodox believers lessons, not only of courtesy and gratitude, but of higher things? A heathen is not seldom more sensitive to the beauty of Christ, and more touched by the story of His sacrifice, than we who have heard of Him all our days.

IV. We note Christ's sad wonder at man's ingratitude and joyful recognition of 'this stranger's' thankfulness. A tone of surprise as well as of sadness can be detected in the pathetic double questions. 'Were not *the* ten'—all of them, the ten who stood there but a minute since—'cleansed? but where are the nine?' Gone off with their gift, and with no spark of thankfulness in their selfish hearts. 'Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?' The numbers of the thankless far surpass those of the thankful. The fewness of the latter surprises and saddens Jesus still. Even a dog knows and will lick the hand that feeds it, but 'Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider.' We increase the sweetness of our gifts by thankfulness for them. We taste them twice when we ruminate on them in gratitude. They live after their death when we bless God and thank Jesus for them all. We impoverish ourselves still more than we dishonour Him by the ingratitude which is so crying a fault. One sorrow hides many joys. A single crumpled rose-leaf made the fairy princess's bed uncomfortable. Some of us can see no blue in our sky if one small cloud is there. Both in regard to earthly

and spiritual blessings we are all sinners by unthankfulness, and we all lose much thereby.

Jesus rejoiced over 'this stranger,' and gave him a greater gift at last than he had received when the leprosy was cleared from his flesh. Christ's raising of him up, and sending him on his way to resume his interrupted journey to the priest, was but a prelude to 'Thy faith hath made thee whole,' or, as the Revised Version margin reads, 'saved thee.' Surely we may take that word in its deepest meaning, and believe that a more fatal leprosy melted out of this man's spirit, and that the faith which had begun in a confidence that Jesus could heal, and had been increased by obedience to the command which tried it, and had become more awed and enlightened by experience of bodily healing, and been deepened by finding a tongue to express itself in thankfulness, rose at last to such apprehension of Jesus, and such clinging to Him in grateful love, as availed to save 'this stranger' with a salvation that healed his spirit, and was perfected when the once leprous body was left behind, to crumble into dust.

### THREE KINDS OF PRAYING

'And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; 2. Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: 3. And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. 4. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; 5. Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. 6. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. 7. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? 8. I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? 9. And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not

as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'—LUKE xviii. 1-14.

THE two parables in this passage are each prefaced by Luke's explanation of their purpose. They are also connected by being both concerned with aspects of prayer. But the second was apparently not spoken at the same time as the first, but is put here by Luke as in an appropriate place.

I. The wearisome widow and the unrighteous judge. The similarities and dissimilarities between this parable and that in chapter xi. 5-8 are equally instructive. Both take a very unlovely character as open to the influence of persistent entreaty; both strongly underscore the unworthiness and selfishness of the motive for yielding. Both expect the hearers to use common-sense enough to take the sleepy friend and the worried judge as contrasts to, not parables, of Him to whom Christians pray. But the judge is a much worse man than the owner of the loaves, and his denial of the justice which it was his office to dispense is a crime; the widow's need is greater than the man's, and the judge's cynical soliloquy, in its unabashed avowal of caring for neither God nor man, and being guided only by regard to comfort, touches a deep depth of selfishness. The worse he was, the more emphatic is the exhortation to persistence. If the continual dropping of the widow's plea could wear away such a stone as that, its like could wear away anything. Yes, and suppose that the judge were as righteous and as full of love and wish to help as this judge was of their opposites; suppose that instead of the cry being a

weariness it was a delight; suppose, in short, that, to go back to chapter xi., we 'call on Him as Father who, without respect of persons, judgeth': then our 'continual coming' will surely not be less effectual than hers was.

But we must note the spiritual experience supposed by the parable to belong to the Christian life. That forlorn figure of the widow, with all its suggestions of helplessness and oppression, is Christ's picture of His Church left on earth without Him. And though of course it is a very incomplete representation, it is a true presentation of one side and aspect of the devout life on earth. 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,' and the truer His servants are to Him, and the more their hearts are with Christ in God, the more they will feel out of touch with the world, and the more it will instinctively be their 'adversary.' If the widow does not feel the world's enmity, it will generally be because she is not a 'widow indeed.'

And another notable fact of Christian experience underlies the parable; namely that the Church's cry for protection from the adversary is often apparently unheard. In chapter xi. the prayer was for supply of necessities, here it is for the specific blessing of protection from the adversary. Whether that is referred to the needs of the Church or of the individual, it is true that usually the help sought is long delayed. It is not only 'souls under the altar' that have to cry 'How long, O Lord, dost Thou not avenge?' One thinks of years of persecution for whole communities, or of long, weary days of harassment and suffering for individuals, of multitudes of prayers and groans sent up into a heaven that, for all the answers sent down, might as well be empty, and one feels it hard to



hold by the faith that 'verily, there is a God that' heareth.

We have all had times when our faith has staggered, and we have found no answer to our heart's question: 'Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?' Many of us have felt what Mary and Martha felt when 'Jesus abode still two days in the place where He was' after He had received their message, in which they had been so sure of His coming at once when He heard that 'he whom Thou lovest is sick,' that they did not ask Him to come. The delays of God's help are a constant feature in His providence, and, as Jesus says here, they are but too likely to take the life out of faith.

But over against these we have to place Jesus' triumphant assurance here: 'He will avenge them speedily.' Yes, the longest delay may yet be 'right early,' for heaven's clock does not beat at the same rate as our little chronometers. God is 'the God of patience,' and He has waited for millenniums for the establishment of His kingdom on earth; His 'own elect' may learn long-suffering from Him, and need to take to heart the old exhortation, 'If the vision tarry, wait for it, for it will surely come, and will not tarry.' Yes, God's delays are not delays, but are for our profit that we may always pray and not faint, and may keep alight the flame of the sure hope that the Son of man cometh, and that in His coming all adversaries shall be destroyed, and the widow, no longer a widow, but the bride, go in to the feast and forget her foes, and 'the days of her mourning be ended.'

## II. The Pharisee and the publican.

Luke's label on this parable tells us that it was spoken to a group of the very people who were per-

sonated in it by the Pharisee. One can fancy their faces as they listened, and how they would love the speaker! Their two characteristics are self-righteousness and depreciation of every one else, which is the natural result of such trust in self. The self-adulation was absolute, the contempt was all-embracing, for the Revised Version rightly renders 'set *all* others at nought.' That may sound exaggerated, but the way to judge of moral characteristics is to take them in their fullest development and to see what they lead to then. The two pictures heighten each other. The one needs many strokes to bring out the features, the other needs but one. Self-righteousness takes many shapes, penitence has but one emotion to express, one cry to utter.

Every word in the Pharisee's prayer is reeking with self-complacency. Even the expression 'prayed with himself' is significant, for it suggests that the prayer was less addressed to God than to himself, and also that his words could scarcely be spoken in the hearing of others, both because of their arrogant self-praise and of their insolent calumnies of 'all the rest.' It was not prayer to God, but soliloquy in his own praise, and it was in equal parts adulation of himself and slander of other men. So it never went higher than the inner roof of the temple court, and was, in a very fatal sense, 'to himself.'

God is complimented with being named formally at first, and in the first two words, 'I thank thee,' but that is only formal introduction, and in all the rest of his prayer there is not a trace of praying. Such a self-satisfied gentleman had no need to ask for anything, so he brought no petitions. He uses the conventional language of thanksgiving, but his real meaning is to praise himself to God, not to thank God for himself.

God is named once. All the rest is I, I, I. He had no longing for communion, no aspiration, no emotion.

His conception of righteousness was mean and shallow. And as St. Bernard notes, he was not so much thankful for being righteous as for being alone in his goodness. No doubt he was warranted in disclaiming gross sins, but he was glad to be free from them, not because they were sins, but because they were vulgar. He had no right to fling mud either on 'all the rest' or on 'this publican,' and if he had been really praying or giving thanks he would have had enough to think of in God and himself without casting sidelong and depreciatory glances at his neighbours. He who truly prays 'sees no man any more,' or if he does, sees men only as subjects for intercession, not for contempt. The Pharisee's notion of righteousness was primarily negative, as consisting in abstinence from flagrant sins, and, in so far as it was positive, it dealt entirely with ceremonial acts. Such a starved and surface conception of righteousness is essential to self-righteousness, for no man who sees the law of duty in its depth and inwardness can flatter himself that he has kept it. To fast twice a week and to give tithes of all that one acquired were acts of supererogation, and are proudly recounted as if God should feel much indebted to the doer for paying Him more than was required. The Pharisee makes no petitions. He states his claims, and tacitly expects that God will meet them.

Few words are needed to paint the publican; for his estimate of himself is simple and one, and what he wants from God is one thing, and one only. His attitude expresses his emotions, for he does not venture to go near the shining example of all respectability

and righteousness, nor to lift his eyes to heaven. Like the penitent psalmist, his iniquities have taken hold on him, so that he is 'not able to look up.' Keen consciousness of sin, true sorrow for sin, earnest desire to shake off the burden of sin, lowly trust in God's pardoning mercy, are all crowded into his brief petition. The arrow thus feathered goes straight up to the throne; the Pharisee's prayer cannot rise above his own lips.

Jesus does not leave His hearers to apply the 'parable,' but drives its application home to them, since He knew how keen a thrust was needed to pierce the triple breastplate of self-righteousness. The publican was 'justified'; that is, accounted as righteous. In the judgment of heaven, which is the judgment of truth, sin forsaken is sin passed away. The Pharisee condensed his contempt into '*this* publican'; Jesus takes up the '*this*' and turns it into a distinction, when He says, '*this man* went down to his house justified.' God's condemnation of the Pharisee and acceptance of the publican are no anomalous aberration of divine justice, for it is a universal law, which has abundant exemplifications, that he that exalteth himself is likely to be humbled, and he that humbles himself to be exalted. Daily life does not always yield examples thereof, but in the inner life and as concerns our relations to God, that law is absolutely and always true.



## ENTERING THE KINGDOM

'And they brought unto Him also infants, that He would touch them: but when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16. But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. 17. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. 18. And a certain ruler asked Him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 19. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. 20. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. 21. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. 22. Now when Jesus heard these things, He said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me. 23. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. 24. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful He said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 25. For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 26. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? 27. And He said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. 28. Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed Thee. 29. And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, 30. Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.'—LUKE xviii. 15-30.

In this section Luke rejoins the other two Evangelists, from whom his narrative has diverged since Luke ix. 51. All three bring together these two incidents of the children in Christ's arms and the young ruler. Probably they were connected in time as well as in subject. Both set forth the conditions of entering the kingdom, which the one declares to be lowliness and trust, and the other to be self-renunciation.

I. We have the child-likeness of the subjects of the kingdom. No doubt there was a dash of superstition in the impulse that moved the parents to bring their children to Jesus, but it was an eminently natural desire to win a good man's blessing, and one to which every parent's heart will respond. It was not the superstition, but the intrusive familiarity, that provoked the disciples' rebuke. A great man's hangers-on are always more careful of his dignity than he is, for it increases their own importance.

The tender age of the children is to be noted. They were 'babes,' and had to be brought, being too young to walk, and so having scarcely yet arrived at conscious, voluntary life. It is 'of such' that the subjects of the kingdom are composed. What, then, are the qualities which, by this comparison, Jesus requires? Certainly not innocence, which would be to contradict all his teaching and to shut out the prodigals and publicans, and clean contrary to the whole spirit of Luke's Gospel. Besides, these scarcely conscious infants were not 'innocent,' for they had not come to the age of which either innocence or guilt can be predicated. What, then, had they which the children of the kingdom must have?

Perhaps the sweet and meek little 131st Psalm puts us best on the track of the answer. It may have been in our Lord's mind; it certainly corresponds to His thought. 'My heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty. . . . I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with his mother.' The infant's lowliness is not yet humility; for it is instinct rather than virtue. It makes no claims, thinks no lofty thoughts of self; in fact, has scarcely begun to know that there is a self at all. On the other hand, clinging trust is the infant's life. It, too, is rudimentary and instinctive, but the impulse which makes the babe nestle in its mother's bosom may well stand for a picture of the conscious trust which the children of the kingdom must have. The child's instinct is the man's virtue. We have

'To travel back  
And tread again that ancient track,'

regaining as the conscious temper of our spirits those excellences of humility and trust of which the first

faint types may be seen in the infant in arms. The entrance gate is very low, and, if we hold our heads high, we shall not get through it. It must be on our hands and knees that we go in. There is no place in the kingdom for those who trust in themselves. We must rely wholly on God manifest in His Son.

So intent is Luke in pointing the lesson that he passes by in silence the infinitely beautiful and touching incident which the world perhaps knows better than any other in our Lord's life—that of His taking the infants in His arms and blessing them. In many ways that incident would have been peculiarly suitable for this Gospel, which delights to bring out the manhood and universal beneficence of Jesus. But if Luke knew of it, he did not care to bring in anything which would weaken the lesson of the conditions of entering the kingdom.

II. We have self-renunciation as the condition of entering the kingdom. The conversation with the ruler (vs. 18-23) sets forth its necessity; the sad exclamation to the bystanders (vs. 24-27) teaches its difficulty; and the dialogue with Peter as representing the twelve (vs. 28-30), its reward.

(1) The necessity of self-renunciation. The ruler's question has much blended good and evil. It expresses a true earnestness, a dissatisfaction with self, a consciousness of unattained bliss and a longing for it, a felt readiness to take any pains to secure it, a confidence in Christ's guidance—in short, much of the child spirit. But it has also a too light estimate of what good is, a mistaken notion that 'eternal life' can be won by external deeds, which implies fatal error as to its nature and his own power to do these. This superficial estimate of goodness, and this over confidence in

his ability to do good acts, are the twin mistakes against which Christ's treatment of him is directed.

Adopting Luke's version of our Lord's answer, the counter-question, which begins it, lays hold of the polite address, which had slipped from the ruler's lips as mere form, and bids him widen out his conceptions of 'good.' Jesus does not deny that He has a right to the title, but questions this man's right to give it Him. The ruler thought of Jesus only as a man, and, so thinking, was too ready with his adjective. Conventional phrases of compliment may indicate much of the low notions from which they spring. He who is so liberal with his ascriptions of goodness needs to have his notions of what it is elevated. Jesus lays down the great truth which this man, in his confidence that he by his own power could do any good needed for eternal life, was perilously forgetting. God is the only good, and therefore all human goodness must come from Him; and if the ruler is to do 'good,' he must first be good, by receiving goodness from God.

But the saying has an important bearing on Christ's character. The world calls Him good. Why? There is none good but God. So we are face to face with this dilemma—Either Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, or He is not good.

Having thus tried to deepen his conceptions, and awaken his consciousness of imperfection, our Lord meets the man on his own ground by referring him to the Law, which abundantly answered his inquiry. The second half of the commandments are alone quoted by Him; for they have especially to do with conduct, and the infractions of them are more easily recognised than those of the first. The ruler expected that some exceptional and brilliant deeds would be pointed out,



and he is relegated to the old homely duties, which it is gross crime not to do.

A shade of disappointment and impatience is in his protestation that he had done all these ever since he was a lad. No doubt he had, and his coming to Jesus confessed that though he had, the doing had not brought him 'eternal life.' Are there not many youthful hearts which would have to say the same, if they would be frank with themselves? They have some longings after a bliss and calm which they feel is not theirs. They have kept within the lines of that second half of the Decalogue, but that amount and sort of 'good thing' has not brought peace. Jesus looks on all such as He did on this young man, 'loves' them, and speaks further to them as He did to him. What was lacking? The soul of goodness, without which these other things were 'dead works.' And what is that soul? Absolute self-renunciation and following Christ. For this man the former took the shape of parting with his wealth, but that external renunciation in itself was as 'dead' and impotent to bring eternal life as all his other good acts had been. It was precious as a means to an end—the entrance into the number of Christ's disciples; and as an expression of that inward self-surrender which is essential for discipleship.

The real stress of the condition is in its second half, 'Follow me.' He who enters the company of Christ's followers enters the kingdom, and has eternal life. If he does not do that, he may give his goods to feed the poor, and it profiteth him nothing. Eternal life is not the external wages for external acts, but the outcome and consequence of yielding self to Jesus, through whom goodness, which keeps the law, flows into the soul.

The requirement pierced to the quick. The man loved the world more than eternal life, after all. But though he went away, he went sorrowful; and that was perhaps the presage that he would come back.

(2) Jesus follows him with sad yearning, and, we may be sure, still sought to draw him back. His exclamation is full of the charity which makes allowance for temptation. It speaks a universal truth, never more needed than in our days, when wealth has flung its golden chains round so many professing Christians. How few of us believe that it gets harder for us to be disciples as we grow richer! There are multitudes in our churches who would be far nearer Christ than they are ever likely to be, if they would literally obey the injunction to get rid of their wealth.

We are too apt to take such commands as applicable only to the individuals who received them, whereas, though, no doubt, the spirit, and not the letter, is the universal element in them, there are far more of us than we are willing to confess, who need to obey the letter in order to keep the spirit. What a depth of vulgar adoration of the power of money is in the disciples' exclamation, 'If rich men cannot get into the kingdom, who can get in!' Or perhaps it rather means, If self-renunciation is the condition, who can fulfil it? The answer points us all to the only power by which we can do good, and overcome self; namely, by God's help. God is 'good,' and we can be good too, if we look to Him. God will fill our souls with such sweetness that earth will not be hard to part with.

(3) The last paragraph of this passage teaches the reward of self-renunciation. Peter shoves his oar in, after his fashion. It would have been better if he had not boasted of their surrender, but yet it was true that

they had given up all. Only a fishing-boat and a parcel of old nets, indeed, but these were all they had to give; and God's store, which holds His children's surrendered valuables, has many things of small value in it—cups of cold water and widows' mites lying side by side with crowns and jewels.

So Jesus does not rebuke the almost innocent self-congratulation, but recognises in it an appeal to his faithfulness. It was really a prayer, though it sounded like a vaunt, and it is answered by renewed assurances. To part with outward things for Christ's sake or for the kingdom's sake—which is the same thing—is to win them again with all their sweetness a hundred-fold sweeter. Gifts given to Him come back to the giver mended by His touch and hallowed by lying on His altar. The present world yields its full riches only to the man who surrenders all to Jesus. And the 'eternal life,' which the ruler thought was to be found by outward deeds, flows necessarily into the heart which is emptied of self, that it may be filled with Him who is the life, and will be perfected yonder.

### THE MAN THAT STOPPED JESUS

'And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto Him: and when he was come near, He asked him, 41. Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?'—LUKE xviii. 40-41.

THIS story of the man that stopped Christ is told by the three 'Synoptic' Evangelists, and it derives a special value from having occurred within a week of the Crucifixion. You remember how graphically Mark tells how the blind man hears who is passing,

and immediately begins to cry with a loud voice to Christ to have mercy upon him; how the officious disciples—a great deal more concerned for the Master's dignity than He was Himself—tried to silence him; and how, with a sturdy persistence and independence of externals which often goes along with blindness, 'he cried the more a great deal' because they did try, and then how he won the distinction of being the man that stopped Christ. When Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called, the crowd wheeled right round at once, and instead of hindering, encumbered him with help, and bade him to 'rise, and be of good cheer.' Then he flings away some poor rag that he had had to cover himself sitting there, and wearing his under-garment only, comes to Christ, and Jesus asks, 'What do you want?' A promise in the shape of a question. Bartimæus knows what he wants, and answers without hesitation, and so he gets his request.

Now, I think in all this incident, and especially in its centre part, which I have read, there are great lessons for us. And the first of them is, I see here a wonderful revelation of Christ's quick sympathy at a moment when He was most absorbed.

I said that all this occurred within a week of our Lord's Crucifixion. If you will recall the way in which that last journey to Jerusalem is described in the Evangelists, you will see that there was something very extraordinary about the determination and tension of spirit which impelled Jesus along the road, all the way from Galilee. Mark says that the disciples followed and were amazed. There was something quite unlike what they had been accustomed to, in His face and bearing, and it was so strange to them that they were



puzzled and frightened. We read, too, that their amazement and fright prevented them from going very near Him on the road; 'as they *followed* they were afraid.' Then the story goes on to tell how James and John, with their arrogant wish, did draw closer to Him, the rest of them lagging behind, conscious of a certain unaccustomed distance between Him and them, which only the ambitious two dared to diminish. Further, one of the Evangelists speaks of His face being 'set' to go to Jerusalem, the gentle lineaments fixed in a new expression of resolution and absorption. The Cross was flinging its shadow over Him. He was bracing Himself up for the last struggle. If ever there was a moment of His life when we might have supposed that He would be oblivious of externals, and especially of the individual sorrows of one poor blind beggar sitting by the roadside, it was that moment. But however plunged in great thoughts about the agonising suffering that He was going to front, and the grand work that He was going to do, and the great victory that He was going to win so soon, He had

'A heart at leisure from itself  
To soothe and sympathise.'

Even at that supreme hour He stood still and commanded him to be called. I wonder if it is saying too much to say that in the exercise of that power of healing and helping Bartimæus, Jesus found some relief from the pressure of impending sorrow.

Brethren, is not that a lesson for us all? It is not spiritualising, allegorising, cramming meanings into an incident that are not in it, when we say—Think of Jesus Christ as one of ourselves, knowing that He was going to His death within a week, and then think of

Him turning to this poor man. Is not that a pattern for us? We are often more selfish in our sorrows than in our joys. Many of us are inclined, when we are weighed down by personal sorrows, to say, 'As long as I have this heavy weight lying on my heart, how can you expect me to take an interest in the affairs of others, or to do Christian work, or to rise to the calls of benevolence and the cries of need?' *We* do not expect *you* to do it; but Jesus Christ did it, 'leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.' Next to the blessed influences of God's own Spirit, and the peace-bringing act of submission, there is no such comfort for sorrow, as to fling ourselves into others' griefs, and to bear others' burdens. Our Lord, with His face set like a flint, on the road to the Cross, but yet sufficiently free of heart to turn to Bartimæus, reads a lesson that rebukes us all, and should teach us all.

Further, do we not see here a beautiful concrete instance, on the lower plane, of the power of earnest desire.

No enemy could have stopped Christ on that road; no opposition could have stopped Him, no beseeching on the part of loving and ignorant friends, repeating the temptation in the wilderness—or the foolish words of Peter, 'This shall not be unto Thee,' could have stopped Him. He would have trodden down all such flimsy obstacles, as a lion 'from the thickets of Jordan' crashes through the bulrushes, but this cry stopped Him, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me, and the Cross and all else that He was hastening to, great as it was for the world, had to wait its turn, for something else had to be done first. There was noise enough on the road, the tramp of many feet, the clatter

of many eager tongues, but the voice of one poor man sitting in the dust there by the roadside, found its way through all the noise to Christ's ears. 'Which things are an allegory.' There is an ocean of praise always, as I might so say, breaking upon Christ's Throne, but the little stream of my petitions flows distinguishable through all that sea. As one of our poets says, we may even think of Him as 'missing my little human praise' when the voice of one poor boy was not heard. Surely amidst all the encouragements that we have to believe that our cry is not sent up into an empty heaven, nor into deaf ears, and that all the multitude of creatures that wait before that Throne do not prevent the individualising knowledge and the individualising love of Jesus Christ from coming straight to every one of us, this little incident is not the least instructive and precious. He that heard Bartimæus will hear us.

In like manner, may I not say that here we have an illustration of how Christ, who has so much besides to do, would suspend other work, if it were needful, in order to do what we need? As I have said, the rest had to wait. Bartimæus stopped Christ. And our hand, if it be the hand of faith, put out to the hem of the garment as Jesus of Nazareth passeth by, will so far stop Him as that He will do what we wish, if what we wish is in accordance with our highest good. There was another man in Jericho who stopped Christ, on that same journey; for not only the petition of Bartimæus, but the curiosity—which was more than curiosity—of Zacchæus, stopped Him, and He who stood still, though He had His face set like a flint to go to Jerusalem, because Bartimæus cried, stood still and looked up into the sycamore tree where the publican was—the best fruit that ever it bore—and

said, 'Zacchæus; come down, I must abide at thy house.' Why *must* He abide? Because He discerned there a soul that He could help and save, and that arrested Him on His road to the Cross.

So, dear friends, amidst all the work of administering the universe which He does, and of guiding and governing and inspiring His Church, which He does, if you ask for the supply of your need He would put that work aside for a moment, if necessary, to attend to you. That is no exaggeration; it is only a strong way of putting the plain truth that Christ's love individualises each of its objects; and lavishes itself upon each one of us; as if there were no other beings in the universe but only our two selves.

And then, remember too, that what Bartimæus got was not taken from any one else. Nobody suffered because Jesus paused to help him. They sat down in ranks, five thousand of them, and as they began to eat, those that were first served would be looked upon with envious eye by the last 'ranks,' who would be wondering if the bits of bread and the two small fishes were enough to go round. But the first group was fed full and the last group had as much, and they took up 'of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full.'

'Enough for all, enough for each,  
Enough for evermore.'

There is one more thought rising out of this story. It teaches a wonderful lesson as to the power which Christ puts into the hand of believing prayer.

What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?' He had asked the same question a little while before, under very different circumstances. When James and John came and tried to beguile Him into a blind promise,



because they knew that it was not likely that they would get what they asked if they said it out at first. He avoided the snare with that same question. To them the question was a refusal; they had said: 'Master, we will that Thou wouldst do whatever we should desire'; and He said: 'What is it that ye desire? Let Me know that first.' But when blind Bartimæus cried, Jesus smiled down upon him—though his sightless eyeballs could not see the smile, there would be a smile in the cadence of His words—and He said: 'What wouldst thou that I should do for thee?' To this suppliant that question was a promise—'I will do what you want.' He puts the key of the royal treasure-house into the hand of faith, and says, 'Go in and help yourself. Take what you will.'

Only, of course, we must remember that there are limitations in the very nature of the case, imposed not arbitrarily, but because the very nature of the truest gifts creates them, and these limitations to some of us sound as if they took all the blessedness out of the act of prayer. 'We know,' says one of the Apostles, 'that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us.' Some of us think that that is a very poor kind of charter, but it sets the necessary limit to the omnipotence of faith. 'What wouldst thou that I should do for thee?' Unless our answer always, and at bottom, is, 'Not my will, but Thine,' we have not yet learnt the highest blessing, nor the truest meaning, of prayer. For to pray does not mean to insist, to press our wishes on God, but it means, first, to desire that our wills may be brought into harmony with His. The old Rabbis hit upon great truths now and then, and one of them said, 'Make God's will thy will, that He may make thy will His will.' If any poor, blind

Bartimæus remembers that, and asks accordingly, he has the key to the royal treasury in his possession, and he may go in and plunge his hand up to the wrist in jewels and diamonds, and carry away bars of gold, and it will all be his.

When this man, who had no sight in his eyeballs, knew that whatever he wanted he should have, he did not need to pause long to consider what it was that he wanted most. If you and I had that Aladdin's lamp given to us, and had only to rub it for a mighty spirit to come that would fulfil our wishes, I wonder if we should be as sure of what we wanted. If we were as conscious of our need as the blind man was of his, we should pause as little in our response to the question: 'What wouldst thou that I should do for thee?' 'Lord! Dost Thou not see that mine eyes are dark? What else but sight can I want?' Jesus still comes to us with the same question. God grant that we may all say; 'Lord, how canst Thou ask us? Dost Thou not see that my soul is stained, my love wandering, my eyeballs dim? Give me Thyself!' If we thus ask, then the answer will come as quickly to us as it did to this blind man: 'Go thy way! Thy faith hath saved thee,' and that 'Go thy way' will not be dismissal from the Presence of our Benefactor, but our 'way' will be the same as Bartimæus' was, when he received his sight, and 'followed Jesus in the way.'

### MELTED BY KINDNESS

'And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house.'—LUKE xix. 5.

It is characteristic of Luke that only he tells the story of Zacchæus. He always dwells with special interest

on incidents bringing out the character of Christ as the Friend of outcasts. His is eminently the Gospel of forgiveness. For example, we owe to Him the three supreme parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, as well as those of the Pharisee and the publican praying in the Temple; and of the good Samaritan. It is he that tells us that all the publicans and sinners came near to Jesus to hear Him; and he loses no opportunity of enforcing the lesson with which this incident closes, 'The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' It is because of the light that it throws upon that great thought that he tells this fascinating story of Zacchæus. I need not repeat it. We all remember it, and the quaintness and grotesqueness of part of it fix it in people's memories. We know how the rich taxgatherer, pocketing his dignity, and unable to see over the heads of the crowd, scrambled up into the branches of the sycamore tree that overhung the road; and there was found by the eye of love, and surprised by the words of kindness, which melted him down, and made a new man of him on the spot. The story seems to me to be full of teaching, to which I desire to turn your attention at this time.

I. First, note the outcast, drawn by imperfect motives to Jesus Christ.

It has been supposed that this man was a Gentile, but his Jewish name establishes his origin. And, if so, the fact that he was a publican *and* a Jew says a good deal about his character. There are some trades which condemn, to a certain extent, the men who engage in them. You would not expect to find a man of sensitive honour acting as a professional spy; or one of earnest religious character keeping a public-house. You would

not expect to find a very good Jew condescending to be the tool of the Roman Government. Zacchæus was at the head of the revenue office in Jericho, a position of considerable importance, inasmuch as there was a large volume of trade through that city from its situation near the fords of the Jordan, and from the fertility of the plain in which it stood. He had made some money, and probably made it by very questionable means. He was the object, not undeservedly, of the execration and suspicion of his countrymen. Italians did not love Italians who took service under Austria. Irishmen did not love Irishmen who in the bad old days used to collect church cess. And so Jews had no very kind feeling towards Jews who became Cæsar's servants. That a man should be in such a position indicated that he cared more for money than for patriotism, religion, or popular approval. His motto was the motto of that Roman Emperor who said, 'Money has no smell,' out of whatever cesspool it may have been fished up. But the consciousness of being encompassed by universal hatred would induce the object of it to put on an extra turn of the screw, and avenge upon individuals the general hostility. So we may take it for granted that Zacchæus, the head of the Jericho custom-house, and rich to boot, was by no means a desirable character.

What made him want to see Jesus Christ? He said to himself, curiosity; but probably he was doing himself injustice, and there was something else working below than merely the wish to see what sort of man was this Rabbi Joshua from Galilee that everybody was talking about. Had he heard that Jesus had a soft place in His heart for his class? Or was he, perhaps, beginning to get tired of being the butt of



universal hatred, and finding that money scarcely compensated for that? Or was there some reaching out towards some undefined good, and a dissatisfaction with a very defined present, though unnamed, evil? Probably so. Like some of us, he put the trivial motive uppermost because he was half ashamed of the half-conscious better one.

I wonder if there are any here now who said to themselves that they would come out of curiosity to hear the preacher, or from some such ordinary motive, and who all the while have, lying deep below that, another reason altogether, a dim feeling that it is not all right between them and God, and that here may be the place to have it put right? At all events, from whatsoever imperfect motives little Zacchæus was perched up in the sycamore there, he went to see Christ, and he got more than he went for. Unconsciously we may be drawn, and imperfect motives may lead us to a perfect Saviour.

He sets us an example in another way. Do not be too punctilious about dignity in pursuing aims that you know to be good. It would be a sight to bring jeers and grins on the faces of the crowd to see the rich man of the custom-house sitting up amongst the leaves. But he did not mind about that if he got a good look at the Rabbi when He passed. People care nothing for ridicule if their hearts are set upon a thing. I wish there were more of us who did not mind being laughed at if only what we did helped us to see Jesus Christ. Do not be afraid of ridicule. It is not a test of truth; in nine cases out of ten it is the grimace of fools.

II. Then, further, notice the self-invited Guest.

When the little procession stopped under the syc-

more tree, Zacchæus would begin to feel uncomfortable. He may have had experience in past times of the way in which the great doctors of orthodoxy were in the habit of treating a publican, and may have begun to be afraid that this new one was going to be like all the rest, and elicit some kind of mob demonstration against him. The crowd would be waiting with intense curiosity to see what would pass between the Rabbi and the revenue collector. They would all be very much astonished. 'Zacchæus! make haste and come down. To-day I must abide at thy house.' Perhaps it was the first time since he had been a child at his mother's knee that he had heard his name pronounced in tones of kindness. There was not a ragged beggar in Jericho who would not have thought himself degraded by putting his foot across the threshold that Jesus now says He will cross.

It is the only time in which we read that Jesus volunteered to go into any house. He never offers to go where He is not wanted, any more than He ever stays away where He is. And so the very fact of His saying 'I will abide at thy house,' is to me an indication that, deep down below Zacchæus' superficial and vulgar curiosity, there was something far more noble which our Lord fosters into life and consciousness by this offer.

Many large truths are suggested by it on which we may touch. We have in Christ's words an illustration of His individualising knowledge. 'Zacchæus, come down.' There is no sign that anybody had told Christ the name, or that He knew anything about Zacchæus before by human knowledge. But the same eye that saw Nathanael under the fig-tree saw Zacchæus in the sycamore; and, seeing in secret, knew without being

told the names of both. Christ does not name men in vain. He generally, when He uses an individual's name in addressing him, means either to assert His knowledge of his character, or His authority over him, or in some way or other to bespeak personal adhesion and to promise personal affection. So He named some of His disciples, weaving a bond that united each single soul to Himself by the act. This individualising knowledge and drawing love and authority are all expressed, as I think, in that one word 'Zacchæus.' And these are as true about us as about him. The promises of the New Testament, the words of Jesus Christ, the great, broad, universal 'whosoever' of His assurance and of His commandments are as directly meant for each of us as if they were in an envelope with our names upon them and put into our hands. We, too, are spoken to by Him by our names, and for us, too, there may be a personal bond of answering love that knits us individually to the Master, as there certainly is a bond of personal regard, compassion, affection, and purpose of salvation in His heart in regard of each single soul of all the masses of humanity. I should have done something if I should have been able to gather into a point, that blessedly pierced some heart to let the life in, the broad truths of the Gospel. 'Whosoever will, let him come.' Say to yourself, 'That is me.' 'Whosoever cometh I will in no wise cast out.' Say to yourself, 'That is me.' And in like manner with all the general declarations, and especially with that chiefest of them all, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.' Read it as you may—and you will never read it right until you do—'God so loved *me*'—John, Mary, or whatever be your name—'Jesus so loved *me*

that if *I* believe upon Him *I* shall not perish, but have everlasting life.'

Then, note, further, how here we get the revelation, in a concrete form, of Christ's perfect willingness and desire to make common cause, and dwell with the most degraded and outcast. I have said that this is the only instance in which He volunteered to be a guest. Pharisees asked Him, and He did not refuse. The publican's dwelling, which was tabooed, He opened the door of by His own hand. And that is what He always does.

This little incident may be taken to be, not merely a symbol of His whole dealings, but an illustration, in small, of the same principle which has its largest embodiment and illustration in the fact of His Incarnation and Manhood. Why did Jesus Christ take flesh and dwell among us? Because He desired to seek and to save that which is lost. Why did He go into the publican's house, and brave the sneers of the crowd, and associate Himself with the polluted? For the same reason. Microscopic crystals and gigantic ones are due to the same forces working in the same fashion. This incident is more than a symbol; it is a little instance of the operation of the law which finds its supreme and transcendent instance in the fact that the Eternal Son of God bowed the heavens and came down 'and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.'

His example is our pattern. A Christian church which does not imitate its Master in its frank and continual willingness to associate itself with the degraded and the outcast has lost one of the truest signs of its being vitalised with the life of Christ. There is much in this day in the condition of Christian communities



to make men dissatisfied and fearful. But there is one thing which, though in all its developments one cannot sympathise with it, is in its essence wholly good, and that is the new and quickened consciousness that a church which does not address itself to the outcasts has no business to live; and that Christian people who are too proud of their righteousness to go amongst the unclean and the degraded are a great deal more of Pharisees than Christians, and have need to learn which be the first principles of the religion which they profess. Self-righteousness gathers up its skirts in holy horror; perfect righteousness goes cheerily and without fear amongst the outcasts, for where should the physician go but to the sick, and where should Christ be found but in the house of the publican?

Further, the saying of our Lord suggests His recognition of the great law that ruled His life. Chronology here is of much importance. We do not generally remember that the scene with Zacchæus was within about a week of the Crucifixion. Our Lord was on that last journey to Jerusalem to die, during the whole of which there was over His demeanour a tension of holy impatience, altogether unlike His usual manner, which astonished and amazed the disciples as they followed Him. He set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem; and strode before them on the way as if He were eager to reach the culmination of His sufferings and of His work. Thus borne on the wings of the strong desire to be perfected on the Cross, He is arrested on His path. Nothing else was able to stop Him, but 'To-day I *must* abide in thy house.' There was a soul to be saved; and the world's sacrifice had to wait till the single soul was secured. Christ hurrying, if I may use the word, at all events steadfastly and

without wavering, pressing towards the Cross, let His course be stopped by this need. The highest 'must' was obedience to the Father's will, and parallel with that need there was the other, of rescuing the Father's prodigal sons. So this elder Brother owned the obligation, and paused on the road to Calvary, to lodge in the house of Zacchæus. Let us learn the sweet lesson, and take the large consolations that lie in such a thought.

Again, the utterance of this self-invited Guest suggests His over-abundant fulfilment of timid, half-conscious desires. I said at the beginning of my remarks that only curiosity was on the surface; but that the very fact that our Lord addressed Himself to the man seemed to imply that He descried in him something more than mere vulgar curiosity. And the glad leap with which Zacchæus came down from his tree might have revealed to Zacchæus himself, as no doubt it did to some of the bystanders, what it was that he had been dimly wishing. So with us all there are needs, longings, half-emerging wishes, that have scarcely come into the field of consciousness, but yet have power enough to modify our actions. Jesus Christ understands all about us, and reads us better than we do ourselves; and is ready to meet, and by meeting to bring into full relief, these vague feelings after an undefined good. Brethren, He is to us, if we will let Him be, all that we want; and He is to us all that we need, although we only half know that we need it, and never say to ourselves that we wish it.

There is a last thought deducible from these words of our Lord's; and that is, His leaving a man to decide whether he will have Him or no. 'Make haste and come down, for to-day I *must* abide at thy house.'

Yes! but if Zacchæus had stuck in his tree, Christ's 'must' would not have been fulfilled. He would have gone on to Jerusalem if the publican had not scrambled down in haste. He forces Himself on no man; He withholds Himself from no man. He respects that awful prerogative of being the architects of our own evil and our own good, by our own free and unconstrained choice.

Did you ever think that it was now or never with this publican; that Jesus Christ was never to go through the streets of Jericho any more; that it was Zacchæus' last chance; and that, if he had not made haste, he would have lost Christ for ever? And so it is yet. There may be some in this place at this moment to whom Jesus Christ is now making His last appeal. I know not; no man knows. A Rabbi said, when they asked him when a man should repent, 'Repent on the last day of your lives.' And they said, 'But we do not know when that will be.' And he said, 'Then repent *now*.' So I say, because some of you may never hear Christ's Gospel again, and because none of us know whether we shall or not; make sure work of it *now*, and do not let Jesus Christ go out of the city and up the road between the hills yonder; for if once the folds of the ravine shut Him from sight He will never be back in Jericho, or seen by Zacchæus any more for ever.

III. And so, lastly, notice the outcast melted by kindness.

We do not know at what stage in our Lord's intercourse with the publican he 'stood and said, Half of my goods I give to the poor,' and so on. But whensoever it was, it was the sign of the entire revolution that had been wrought upon him by the touch of that loving

hand, and by the new fountain of sympathy and love that he had found in Jesus Christ.

Some people have supposed, indeed, that his words do not mark a vow for the future, but express his practice in the past. But it seems to me to be altogether incongruous that Zacchæus should advertise his past good in order to make himself out to be not quite so bad as people thought him, and, therefore, not so unworthy of being Christ's host. Christ's love kindles sense of our sin, not complacent recounting of our goodness. So Zacchæus said, 'Lord! Thou hast loved me, and I wonder. I yield, and fling away my black past; and, so far as I can, make restitution for it.'

The one transforming agency is the love of Christ received into the heart. I do not suppose that Zacchæus knew as much about Jesus Christ even after the conversation as we do; nor did he see His love in that supreme death on the Cross as we do. But the love of the Lord made a deep dint in his heart, and revolutionised his whole nature. The thing that will alter the whole current and set of a man's affections, that will upset his estimate of the relative value of material and spiritual, and that will turn him inside out and upside down, and make a new man of him, is the revelation of the supreme love that in Jesus Christ has come into the world, with an individualising regard to each of us, and has died on the Cross for the salvation of us all. Nothing else will do it. People had frowned on Zacchæus, and it made him bitter. They had execrated and persecuted him; and his only response was setting his teeth more firmly and turning the screw a little tighter when he had the chance. You can drive a man into devilry by contempt. If you want to melt him into goodness, try love. The Ethiopian cannot



change his skin, but Jesus Christ can change his heart, and that will change his skin by degrees. The one transforming power is faith in the love of Jesus Christ.

Further, the one test of a true reception of Him is the abandonment of past evil and restitution for it as far as possible. People say that our Gospel is unreal and sentimental, and a number of other ugly adjectives. Well! If it ever is so, it is the fault of the speakers, and not of the Gospel. For its demands from every man that accepts it are intensely practical, and nothing short of a complete turning of his back upon his old self, shown in the conclusive forsaking of former evil, however profitable or pleasant, and reparation for harm done to men, satisfies them.

It is useless to talk about loving Jesus Christ and trusting Him, and having the sweet assurance of forgiveness, and a glorious hope of heaven, unless these have made you break off your bad habits of whatsoever sort they may be, and cast them behind your backs. Strong emotion, sweet deep feeling, assured confidence in the sense of forgiveness and the hope of heaven, are all very well. Let us see your faith by your works; and of these works the chief is—Behold the evil that I did, I do it no more: ‘Behold! Lord! the half of my goods I give to the poor.’ There was a young ruler, a chapter before this, who could not make up his mind to part with wealth in order to follow Christ. This man has so completely made up his mind to follow Christ that he does not need to be bidden to give up his worldly goods. The half given to the poor, and fourfold restoration to those whom he had wronged, would not leave much. How astonished Zacchæus would have been if anybody had said to him

that morning, 'Zacchæus! before this night falls you will be next door to a pauper, and you will be a happier man than you are now!'

So, dear friends, like him, all of us may, if we will, and if we need, make a sudden right-about-face that shall alter the complexion of our whole future. People tell us that sudden conversions are suspicious. So they may be in certain cases. But the moment when a man makes up his mind to change the direction in which his face is set will always be a moment, however long may be the hesitation, and the meditation, and the preparation that led up to it.

Jesus Christ is standing before each of us as truly as He did before that publican, and is saying to us as truly as He said to him, 'Let Me in.' 'Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If any man open . . . I will enter.' If He comes in He will teach you what needs to be turned out if He is to stop; and will make the sacrifice blessed and not painful; and you will be a happier and a richer man with Christ and nothing than with all beside and no Christ.

## THE TRADING SERVANTS

'Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. . . . And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds.'—LUKE xix. 16, 18.

THE Evangelist, contrary to his usual practice, tells us what was the occasion of this parable. It was spoken at Jericho, on our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem, Bethany was but a day's march distant; Calvary but a week ahead. An unusual tension of spirit marked our Lord's demeanour, and was noticed by the disciples with awe. It infected them, and the excitable crowd,

which was more than usually excitable because on its way to the passover festival. The air was electric, and everybody felt that something was impending. They 'thought that the kingdom of God should *immediately* appear.' So Christ spoke this parable to damp down that expectation which might easily flash up into the flame of rebellion. He tells them His real programme. He was to go a long way off to receive the kingdom. That was a familiar experience amongst the nations tributary to Rome, and more than one of the Herodian family had passed through it. In the meantime there was to be a period of expectancy. It was to be a long time, for he had to go to a 'far country,' and it was to be extended enough for the servants to turn their money over many times during His absence. When He *did* return it was not to do what they expected. They thought that the kingdom meant Jewish lordship over subject nations. He teaches them that it meant the destruction of the rebellious citizens, and a rigid scrutiny of the servants' faithfulness.

Now, the words of my two texts bring out in connection with this outline of the future some large lessons which I desire to draw.

I. Notice the small capital that the servants receive to trade with.

It was a pound apiece, which, numismatic authorities tell us, is somewhat about the same value as some £6 odd of English money; though, of course, the purchasing power would be considerably greater. A small amount, and an equal amount to every servant—these are the two salient points of this parable. They make the broad distinction between it and the other parable, which is often mixed up with it, the parable of the

talents. There, instead of the amount being excessively small, it is exceedingly great; for a talent was worth some £400, and ten talents would be £4000, a fair capital for a man to start with. The other point of difference between the two parables, which belongs to the essence of each, is that while the gift in the one case is identical, in the other case it is graduated and different.

Now, to suppose that these are but two varying versions of the same parable, which the Evangelists have manipulated is, in my judgment, to be blind to the plainest of the lessons to be drawn from them.

There are two sorts of gifts. In one, all Christian men, the Master's servants, are alike; in another, they differ. Now, what is the thing in which all Christians are alike? What gift do they all possess equally; rich and poor, largely endowed or slenderly equipped; 'talented'—as we use the word from the parable—or not? The rich man and the poor, the wise man and the foolish, the cultured man and the ignorant, the Fijian and the Englishman, have one thing alike—the message of salvation which we call the Gospel of the blessed Lord. That is the 'pound.' We all stand upon an equal platform there, however differently we are endowed in respect of capacities and other matters. All have it; and all have the same.

Now if that is the interpretation of this parable, there are considerations that flow from that thought, and on which I would dwell for a moment.

The first of them is the apparent smallness of the gift. You may feel a difficulty in accepting that explanation, and may have been saying to yourselves that it cannot be correct, because Jesus Christ would never compare the unspeakable gift of His message



of salvation through Him, to that paltry sum. But throw yourselves back to the moment of utterance, and I think you will feel the pathos and power of the metaphor. Here was that handful of disciples set in the midst of a hostile world, dead against them, with its banded superstitions, venerable idolatries, systematised philosophies, the force of the mightiest instruments of material power that the world had ever seen, in the organisation and military power of Rome. And there stood twelve Galilean men, with their simple, unlettered message; one poor 'pound,' and that was all. 'The foolishness of preaching,' the message which to 'the Jews was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks was folly,' was all that they were equipped with. Their Master, who left them to seek a Kingdom, had so little to bestow, before He received His crown, that all that He could spare them was that small sum. They had to go into business in a very poor way. They had to be content to do a very insignificant retail trade. 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.' The old experience of the leather sling and the five stones out of the brook, in the hand of the stripling, that made short work of the brazen armour of the giant, and penetrated with a whizz into his thick skull, and laid him prostrate, was to be repeated. 'He called his servants, and gave them'—a pound apiece! If you and I, Christian men and women, were true to the Master's legacy, and believed that we have in it more wealth than the treasures of wisdom and knowledge or force which the world has laid up, we should find that our mite was more than they all have in their possession.

Further, the texts suggest the purpose for which the

pound is given. The servants had to live on it themselves, no doubt. So have we. They had to trade with it. So have we. Now that means two things. We get the Gospel, not as some of us lazily suppose, in order to secure that we shall not be punished for our past sins whilst we live, and go to heaven when we die. We get it, not only to enjoy its consolations and its sweetness, but to do business with.

And there are two ways in which this trading is to be done by us. The main one is the honest application of the principles and powers of the Gospel to the moulding of our own characters, and the making us better, purer, gentler, more heavenly-minded, and more Christlike. That is the first trading that we have to carry on with the Word. We get it not for an indolent assent, as so many of us misuse it. We receive it not merely to say, 'Oh! I believe it,' and there an end, but that we may bring it to bear upon all our conduct, and that it may be the chief formative influence in our characters. Christian people! is that what you do with your Christianity? Is the Gospel moulding you, hour by hour, moment by moment? Have you brought all its great truths to bear upon your daily lives? Have you inwrought its substance into, not merely your understandings or your emotions, but your daily conduct? Is it indeed the life of your lives, and the leaven that is leavening your whole character? You have it to trade with; see that you do not wrap it in a napkin, and stow it idly away in some corner.

Then there is the other way of trading and that is, telling it to others. That is an obligation incumbent on all Christians. There may be differences in regard to other gifts, which determine the manner in which each shall use the equal gift which we all possess alike.

But these are of subordinate importance. The main thing is to feel that the possession of Christian faith, which is our way of receiving the pound, carries with it indissolubly the obligation of Christian evangelism. However it may be discharged, discharged it is to be, by every true servant. I am sometimes half disposed to think that it would have been better for the Church if there had never been any men in my position, on whom the mass of unspiritual, idle because busy, and silent because little-loving, Christian professors contentedly roll the whole obligation to preach God's Gospel. My brethren, the world is not going to be evangelised by officials. Until all Christian people wake up to the sense that they have the 'pound' to trade with, there will be nothing adequate done to bring the world to the obedience and the love of Jesus Christ. You say you have the Gospel; if you have it what are you doing with it?

Self-centred Christianity, if such a thing were possible, is a mistake. It is generally a sham; it is always a crime. A man that puts away his pound, and never goes out and says, 'Come, share with me in the wealth that I have found in Jesus Christ,' will be like a miser that puts his hoardings into an old stocking, and hides it in the ground somewhere. When he goes to dig it up, he is only too likely to find that all the coins have slipped out. If you want to keep your Christianity, let the air into it. If you want it to increase, sow it. There are hosts of you who would be far happier Christian people, if you came out of your shells and traded with your pound.

II. Observe the varying profits of the trading.

The one man says, 'Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.' The other says, 'Thy pound hath gained five

pounds.' And the others who are not mentioned, no doubt, had also varying results to present. Now that inequality of profits from an equal capital to start with, is but a picturesque way of saying what is, alas! too obviously true, that Christian people do not all stand on the same level in regard to the use they have made of, and the benefits they have derived from, the one equal gift which was bestowed upon them. It is the same to every one at the beginning, but differences develop as they go on. One man makes twice as much out of it as another does.

Now, let us distinctly understand what sort of differences these are which our Lord signalises here. Let me clear away a mistake which may interfere with the true lessons of this parable, that the differences in question are the superficial ones in apparent results which follow from difference of endowments, or from difference of influential position. That is the kind of meaning that is often attached to the 'ten pounds' or the 'five pounds' in the text. We think that the ten pounder is the man who has been able to do some large spiritual work for Jesus Christ, that fills the world with its greatness, the man who has been set in some most conspicuous place, and by reason of intellectual ability or other talent has been able to gather in many souls into the kingdom; but that is not Christ's way of estimating. We should be going dead in the teeth of everything that He teaches if we thought that such as these were the differences intended. No, no! Every man that co-operates in a great work with equal diligence and devotion has an equal place in his eyes. The soldier that clapped Luther on the back as he was going into the Diet of Worms, and said, 'You have a bigger fight to fight



than we ever had; cheer up, little monk!' stands on the same level as the great reformer, if what he did was done from the same motive and with as full consecration of himself. The old law of Israel states the true principle of Christian recompense: they that 'abide by the stuff' have the same share in the spoil as they 'that go down into the battle.' All servants who have exercised equal faithfulness and equal diligence stand on the same level and have the same success; no matter how different may be their estimation in the eyes of men; no matter how different may be the conspicuousness of the places that they fill in the eyes of the world whilst they live, or in the records of the Church when they are dead. Equal diligence will issue in equal results in the development of character, and the only reason for the diversity of results is the diversity of faithfulness and of zeal in trading with the pound.

Notice, too, before I go further, how all who trade make profits. There are no bad debts in that business. There are no investments that result in a loss. Everybody that goes into it makes something by it; which is just to say that any man who is honest and earnest in the attempt to utilise the powers of Christ's Gospel for his own culture, or for the world's good, will succeed in reality, however he may seem to fail in appearance. There are no commercial failures in this trading. The man with his ten pounds of profit made them because he worked hardest. The man that made the five made all that his work entitled him to. There was no one who came and said, 'Lord! I put thy pound into my little shop, and I did my best with it, and it is all gone!' Every Christian effort is crowned with success.

III. Lastly, we have here the final declaration of profits.

The master has come back. He is a king now, but he is the master still, and he wants to know what has become of the money that was left in the servants' hands. Now, that is but a metaphorical way of bringing to our minds that which we cannot conceive of without metaphor—viz., the retribution that lies beyond the grave for us all. Although we cannot conceive it without metaphor, we may reach, through the metaphor to some apprehension, at any rate, of the facts that lie behind it. There are two points in reference to this final declaration of profits suggested here.

The first is this, that all the profit is ascribed to the capital. Neither of the two men say: 'I, with thy pound, have gained,' but 'Thy pound hath gained.' That is accurately true. For if I accept, and live by, any great moral truth or principle, it is the principle or the truth that is the real productive cause of the change in my life and character. I, by my acceptance of it, simply put the belt on the drum that connects my loom with the engine, but it is the engine that drives the looms and the shuttle, and brings out the web at last. And so, Christian people who, with God's grace in their hearts, have utilised the 'pound,' and thereby made themselves Christlike, have to say, 'It was not I, but Christ in me. It was the Gospel, and not my faith in the Gospel, that wrought this change.' Is it your teeth or your dinner that nourishes you? Is it the Gospel or your trust in the Gospel that is the true cause of your sanctifying?

With regard to the other aspect of this trading, the same thing is true. Is it my word or Christ's Word

ministered by me that helps any of my hearers who are helped? Surely! surely! there is no question about that. It is the 'pound' that gains the 'pounds.' 'Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So, then, neither is he that planteth anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.'

The other consideration suggested by these words is the exact knowledge of the precise results of a life, which is possessed at last. Each servant knew precisely what was the nett outcome of his whole activity. That is exactly what we do not know here, and never shall, and never can know. But yonder all illusions will have vanished; and there will be two sorts of disillusionising then. Men, for instance, of my profession, whose names are familiar, and who hold high places in the esteem of the Church, and may be tempted to suppose that they have done a great deal—I am afraid that many of us will find, when we get yonder, that we have not done nearly so much as our admirers in this world, and we ourselves, were sometimes tempted to think that we had done. The searching light that comes in will show a great many seamy places in the cloth that looks very sound when it is inspected in the twilight. And there will be another kind of disillusionising. Many a man has said, 'Lord! I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought,' who will find out that he was mistaken, and that where he saw failure there were solid results; that where he thought the grain had perished in the furrows, it had sprung up and borne fruit unto life everlasting. 'Lord! when saw we Thee in prison, and visited Thee?' We never knew that we had done anything of the sort. 'Behold! I was left alone,' said

the widowed Jerusalem when she was restored to her husband, 'these'—children that have gathered round me—'where had they been?' We shall know, for good or bad, exactly the results of our lives.

We shall have to tell them. The slothful servant, too, was under this compulsion of absolute honesty. If he had not been so, do you think he would have ventured to stand up before his master, a king now, and insult him to his face? But he had to turn himself inside out, and tell then what he had thought in his inmost heart. So 'every one of us shall give an account of himself to God'; and like a man in the bankruptcy court, we shall have to explain our books, and go into all our transactions. We are working in the dark to-day. Our work will be seen as it is, in the light. The coral reef rises in the ocean, and the creatures that made it do not see it. The ocean will be drained away, and the reef will stand up sheer and distinct.

My brother! 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire'—and when you have bought your pound, see that you use it; for 'it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.'

## THE REWARDS OF THE TRADING SERVANTS

'Because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities . . . Be thou also over five cities.'—LUKE xix. 17, 19.

THE relation between this parable of the pounds and the other of the talents has often been misunderstood, and is very noteworthy. They are not two editions of one parable variously manipulated by the Evangelists, but they are two parables presenting two kindred and



yet diverse aspects of one truth. They are neither identical, as some have supposed, nor contradictory, as others have imagined; but they are complementary. The parable of the talents represents the servants as receiving different endowments; one gets five; another two; another one. They make the same rate of profit with their different endowments. The man that turned his two talents into four did just as well as he that turned his five into ten. In either case the capital is doubled. Since the diligence is the same, the rewards are the same, and to each is given the identical same eulogium and the same entrance into the joy of his Lord. So the lesson of that parable is that, however unequal are our endowments, there may be as much diligence shown in the use of the smallest as in the greatest, and where that is the case, the man with the small endowments will stand on the same level of recompense as the man with the large.

But that is not all. This parable comes in to complete the thoughts. Here all the servants get the same gift, the one pound, but they make different profits out of it, one securing twice as much as the other. And, inasmuch as the diligence has been different, the rewards are different. So the lesson of this parable is that unequal faithfulness in the use of the same opportunities results in unequal retribution and reward. Unequal faithfulness, I say, because, of course, in both parables it is presupposed that the factor in producing the profit is not any accidental circumstance, but the earnestness and faithfulness of the servant. Christ does not pay for results; He pays for motives. And it is not because the man has made a certain number of pounds, but because in making them he has shown a certain amount of faithfulness, that he is rewarded.

Christ does not say, 'Well done! good and *successful* servant,' but 'Well done! good and *faithful* servant.'

So, keeping these two sides of the one truth in view, I desire now to draw out two or three of the lessons which seem to me to lie in the principle laid down in my texts, of the unequal results of the unequal diligence of these servants.

I. I would note the solemn view of this present life that underlies the whole.

'Thou hast been faithful in a very little; have thou authority over five cities.' Well, that rests upon the thought that all our present life here is a stewardship, which in its nature is preparatory to larger work yonder. And that is the point of view from which alone it is right to look at, and possible to understand, this else unintelligible and bewildering life on earth. Clearly enough, to anybody that has eyes in his head, moral ends are supreme in man's relation to nature, and in man's life. We are here for the sake of making character, and of acquiring aptitudes and capacities which shall be exercised hereafter. The whole of our earthly career is the exercise of stewardship in regard to all the gifts with which we have been entrusted, in order that by the right exercise of that stewardship we may develop ourselves and acquire powers.

Now if it is clear that the whole meaning and end of the present life are to make character, and that we have to do with the material and the transient only, in order that, like the creatures that build up the coral reefs, we may draw from the ever-varying waves of the ocean that welters around us solid substance which we can pile up into an enduring monument—is this

process of making character, and developing ourselves, to be cut short by such a contemptible thing as the death of the body? One very distinguished evolutionist, who has been forced onwards from his position to a kind of theism, declares that he is driven to a belief in immortality because he must believe in the reasonableness of God's work. And it seems to me that if indeed—as is plainly the case—moral ends are supreme in our life's history, it brings utter intellectual bewilderment and confusion to suppose that these ends are kept in view up till the moment of death, and that then down comes the guillotine and cuts off all. God does not take the rough ore out of the mine, and deal with it, and change it to polished steel, and shape His weapons, and then take them when they are at their highest temper and their sharpest edge, and break them across His knee. No! if here we are shaped, it is because yonder there is work for the tool.

So all here is apprenticeship, and the issues of to-day are recorded in eternity. We are like men perched up in a signal-box by the side of the line; we pull over a lever here, and it lifts an arm half a mile off. The smallest wheel upon one end of a shaft may cause another ten times its diameter to revolve, at the other end of the shaft through the wall there. Here we prepare, yonder we achieve.

II. Note the consequent littleness and greatness of this present.

‘Thou hast been faithful in a very little.’ Some of you may remember a recent sermon on the previous part of this parable, in which I tried to bring out an explanation of the small sum with which these servants were entrusted—the pound apiece for their little retail businesses—and found reason to believe that the inter-

pretation of that gift was the Gospel of Jesus Christ which, in comparison with the world's wisdom and philosophies and material forces, seemed such a very insignificant thing. If we keep that interpretation in view in treating my present text, then there is hinted to us the contrast between the necessary limitations and incompletenesses even of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ which we have here, and the flood of glory and of light, which shall pour upon our eyes when the veil of flesh and sense has dropped away. Here we know in part; here, even with the intervention of the Eternal and Incarnate Word of God, the Revealer of the Father, we see as in a glass darkly; there face to face. The magnificences and the harmonies of that great revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which transcends all human thought and all worldly wisdom, are but a point, in comparison with the continent of illumination which shall come to us hereafter. 'The moon that rules the night' is the revelation that we have to-day, the reflection and echo of the sun that will rule the unsetting day of the heavens.

But I pass from that aspect of the words before us to the other, which, I suppose, is rather to be kept in view, in which the faithfulness in a very little points to the smallness of this present, as measured against that infinite future to which it conducts. Much has been said upon that subject, which is very antagonistic to the real ideas of Christianity. Life here, and this present, have been depreciated unduly, untruly, and unthankfully. And harm has been done, not only to the men who accept that estimate, but to the world that scoffs at it. There is nothing in the Bible, which is at all in sympathy with the so-called religious depreciation of the present, but there is this—"the



things that are seen are temporal; the things that are unseen are eternal.' The lower hills look high when beheld from the flat plain that stretches on this side of them; but, if the mist lifts, the great white peaks come out beyond them, glittering in the sunshine, and with the untrodden snows on their inaccessible pinnacles; and nobody thinks about the green foothills, with the flowers upon them, any more. Brethren, think away the mist, for you can, and open your eyes, and see the snow-clad hills of eternity, and then you will understand how low is the elevation of the heights in the foreground. The greatness of the future makes the present little, but the little present is great, because its littleness is the parent of the great future. 'The child is father of the man'; and earth's narrow range widens out into the infinitude of eternity and of heaven. The only thing that gives real greatness and sublimity to our mortal life is its being the vestibule to another. Historically you will find that, wherever faith in a future life has become dim, as it has become dim in large sections of the educated classes to-day, there the general tone of strenuous endeavour has dropped, and the fatal feeling of 'It is not worth while' begins to creep over society. 'Is life worth living?' is the question that is asked on all sides of us to-day. And the modern recrudescence of pessimism has along with it, as one of the main thoughts which cut the nerves of effort, doubt of, and disbelief in, a future. It is because the very little opens out into the immeasurably great, and the passing moments tick us onwards into an unpassing eternity, that the moments are worth living through, and the fleeting insignificances of earth's existence become solemn and majestic as the portals of heaven.

III. Notice the future form of activity prepared for by faithful trading.

'Thou hast been faithful in a very little; have thou authority over ten cities.' Now I do not need to spend a word in dwelling on the contrast between the two pictures of the huckster with his little shop and the pound of capital to begin with, and the vizier that has control of ten of the cities of his master. That is too plain to need any enforcement. We are all here, all us Christian people especially, like men that keep a small shop, in a back street, with a few trivial things in the window, but we are heirs of a kingdom. That is what Christ wants us to lay to heart, so that the little shop shall not seem so very small, and its smoky obscurity shall be irradiated by true visions of what it will lead to.

Nor do I wish to risk any kind of fanciful and precarious speculations as to the manner and the sphere of the authority that is here set forth; only I would keep to one or two plain things. Faithfulness here prepares for participation in Christ's authority hereafter. For we are not to forget that whilst the master, the nobleman, was away seeking the kingdom, all that he could give his servants was the little stock-in-trade with which he started them, and that it is because he has won his kingdom that he is able to dispense to them the larger gifts of dominion over the ten and the five cities. The authority is delegated, but it is more than that—it is shared. For it is participation in, and not merely delegation from, the King and His rule, that is set forth in this and in other places of Scripture, for 'they shall sit down with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne.'

If, then, the rule set forth, in whatever sphere and in whatever fashion it may be exercised, is participation in Christ's authority, let us not forget that therefore it is a rule of which the manifestation is service. In heaven as on earth, and for the Lord in heaven as for the Lord on earth, and for the servants in heaven as for the servants on earth, the law stands irrefragable and eternal—'If any man will be chief among you, let him be your minister.' The authority over the ten cities is the capacity and opportunity of serving and helping every citizen in them all. What that help may be let us leave. It is better to be ignorant than to speculate about matters where there is no possibility of certainty. Ignorance is more impressive than knowledge, only be sure that no dignity can live amidst the pure light of the heavens, except after the fashion of the dignity of the Lord of all, who there, as here, is the servant of all.

But there is a thought in connection with this great though dim revelation of the future, which may well be laid to heart by us. And that is, that however close and direct the dependence on, and the communion with, Jesus Christ, the King of all His servants, in that future state is, it shall not be so close and direct as to exclude room for the exercise of brotherly sympathy and brotherly aid. We shall have Christ for our life and our light and our glory. But there, as here, we shall help one another to have Him more fully, and to understand Him more perfectly. What further lies in these great words, I do not venture to guess. Enough to know that Christ will be all in all, and that Christ in each will help the others to know Christ more fully.

Only remember, we have to take this great concep-

tion of the future as being one that implies largely increased and ennobled activity. A great deal of very cheap ridicule has been cast upon the Christian conception of the future life as if it was an eternity of idleness and of repose. Of repose, yes ; of idleness, no ! For it is no sinecure to be the governor of ten cities. There will be a good deal of work to be done, in order to discharge that office properly. Only it will be work that does not disturb repose, and at one and the same moment His servants will serve in constant activity, and gaze upon His face in calm contemplation. Christ's session at the right hand of God does not interfere with Christ's continual activity here. And, in like manner, His servants shall rest from their labours, but not from their work ; they shall serve Him undisturbed, and shall repose, but not idly.

IV. Lastly, our texts remind us of the variety in recompense which corresponds to diversity in faithfulness.

I need but say a word about that. The one man gets his ten cities because his faithfulness has brought in ten pounds. The other gets five, corresponding to his faithfulness. As I said, our Lord pays, not for results, except in so far as these are conditioned and secured by the diligence of His servants. And so we come to the old familiar, and yet too often forgotten, conception of degrees in dignity, degrees in nearness to Him. That thought runs all through the New Testament representations of a future life, sometimes more clearly, sometimes more obscurely, but generally present. It is in entire accordance with the whole conception of that future, because the Christian notion of it is not that it is an arbitrary reward, but that it is the natural outcome of the



present; and, of course, therefore, varying according to the present, of which it is the outcome. We get what we have wrought for. We get what we are capable of receiving, and what we are capable of receiving depends upon what has been our faithfulness here.

Now, that is perfectly consistent with the other side of the truth which the twin parable sets forth—viz., that the recompenses of the future are essentially one. All the servants, who were entrusted with the Talents, received the same eulogium, and entered into the same joy of their Lord. That is one side of the truth. And the other is, that the degree in which Christian people, when they depart hence, possess the one gift of eternal life, and Christ-shared joy is conditioned by their faithfulness and diligence here. Do not let the Gospel that says ‘The gift of God is eternal life’ make you forget the completing truths, that the measure in which a man possesses that eternal life depends on his fitness for it, and that fitness depends on his faithfulness of service and his union with his Lord.

We obscure this great truth often by reason of the way in which we preach the deeper truth on which it rests—forgiveness and acceptance all unmerited, through faith in Jesus Christ. But the two things are not contradictory; they are complementary. No man will be faithful as a steward who is not full of faith as a penitent sinner. No man will enter into the joy of his Lord, who does not enter in through the gate of penitence and trust, but, having entered, we are ranked according to the faithfulness of our service and diligence of stewardship. ‘Wherefore, giving all diligence, make your calling and election sure, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly*

into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'

## A NEW KIND OF KING

'And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; 38. Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. 39. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto Him, Master, rebuke Thy disciples. 40. And He answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. 41. And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, 42. Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. 43. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, 44. And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. 45. And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; 46. Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. 47. And He taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him, 48. And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.'—LUKE xix. 37-48.

'HE went on before.' What concentrated determination, and almost eagerness, impelled His firm and swift steps up the steep, weary road! Mark tells that the disciples followed, 'amazed'—as they well might be—at the unusual haste, and strange preoccupation on the face, set as a flint.

Luke takes no notice of the stay at Bethany and the sweet seclusion which soothed Jesus there. He dwells only on the assertion of royalty, which stamped an altogether unique character on the remaining hours of Christ's life.

I. The narrative brings into prominence Christ's part in originating the triumphal entry (vs. 30-34). He sent for the colt with the obvious intention of stimulating the people to just such a demonstration as followed.

As to the particulars, we need only note that the

most obvious explanation of His knowledge of the circumstances that the messengers would encounter, is that it was supernatural. Only one other explanation is possible; namely, that the owners of the animal were secret disciples, with whom our Lord had arranged to send for it, and had settled a sign and countersign, by which they would know His messengers. But that is a less natural explanation.

Note the remarkable blending of dignity and poverty in 'The Lord hath need of him.' It asserts sovereign authority and absolute rights, and it confesses need and penury. He is a King, but He has to borrow even a colt to make His triumphal entry on. Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor.

Jesus then deliberately brought about His public entry. He thereby acts in a way perfectly unlike His whole previous course. And He stirs up popular feelings at a time when they were specially excitable by reason of the approaching Passover and its crowds. Formerly He had avoided the danger which He now seems to court, and had gone up to the feast 'as it were in secret.' But it was fitting that once, for the last time, He should assert before the gathered Israel that He was their King, and should make a last appeal. Formerly He had sought to avoid attracting the attention of the rulers; now He knows that the end is near, and deliberately makes Himself conspicuous, though—or we might say because—He knew that thereby He precipitated His death.

The nature of His dominion is as plainly taught by the humble pomp as is its reality. A pauper King, who makes His public entrance into His city mounted on a borrowed ass, with His followers' clothes for a saddle, attended by a shouting crowd of poor peasants, who

for weapons or banners had but the branches plucked from other people's trees, was a new kind of king.

We do not need Matthew's quotation of the prophet's vision of the meek King coming to Zion on an ass, to understand the contrast of this kingdom with such a dominion as that of Rome, or of such princes as the Herods. Gentleness and peace, a sway that rests not on force nor wealth, are shadowed in that rustic procession and the pathetic poverty of its leader, throned on a borrowed colt, and attended, not by warriors or dignitaries, but by poor men unarmed, and saluted, not with the blare of trumpets, but with the shouts of joyful, though, alas! fickle hearts.

II. We have the humble procession with the shouting disciples and the background of hostile spies. The disciples eagerly caught at the meaning of bringing the colt, and threw themselves with alacrity into what seemed to them preparation for the public assertion of royalty, for which they had long been impatient. Luke tells us that they lifted Jesus on to the seat which they hurriedly prepared, while some spread their garments in the way—the usual homage to a king:

‘Ride on triumphantly; behold, we lay  
Our lusts and proud wills in Thy way.’

How different the vision of the future in their minds and His! They dreamed of a throne; He knew it was a Cross. Round the southern shoulder of Olivet they came, and, as the long line of the Temple walls, glittering in the sunshine across the valley, burst on the view, and their approach could be seen from the city, they broke into loud acclamations, summoning, as it were, Jerusalem to welcome its King.

Luke's version of their chant omits the Jewish



colouring which it has in the other Gospels, as was natural, in view of his Gentile readers. Christ's royalty and divine commission are proclaimed from a thousand throats, and then up swells the shout of praise, which echoes the angels' song at Bethlehem, and ascribes to His coming, power to make peace in heaven with an else alienated world, and thus to make the divine glory blaze with new splendour even in the highest heavens.

Their song was wiser than they knew, and touched the deepest, sweetest mysteries of the unity of the Son with the Father, of reconciliation by the blood of His Cross, and of the new lustre accruing to God's name thereby, even in the sight of principalities and powers in heavenly places. They meant none of these things, but they were unconscious prophets. Their shouts died away, and their faith was almost as short-lived. With many of them, it withered before the branches which they waved.

High-wrought emotion is a poor substitute for steady conviction. But cool, unemotional recognition of Christ as King is as unnatural. If our hearts do not glow with loyal love, nor leap up to welcome Him; if the contemplation of His work and its issues on earth and in heaven does not make our dumb tongues sing—we have need to ask ourselves if we believe at all that He is the King and Saviour of all and of us. There were cool observers there, and they make the foil to the glad enthusiasm. Note that these Pharisees, mingling in the crowd, have no title for Jesus but 'Teacher.' He is no king to them. To those who regard Jesus but as a human teacher, the acclamations of those to whom He is King and Lord always sound exaggerated.

People with no depth of religious life hate religious

emotion, and are always seeking to repress it. A very tepid worship is warm enough for them. Formalists detest genuine feeling. Propriety is their ideal. No doubt, too, these croakers feared that this tumult might come to formidable size, and bring down Pilate's heavy hand on them.

Christ's answer is probably a quoted proverb. It implies His entire acceptance of the character which the crowd ascribed to Him, His pleasure in their praises, and, in a wider aspect, His vindication of outbursts of devout feeling, which shock ecclesiastical martinets and formalists.

III. We see the sorrowing King plunged in bitter grief in the very hour of His triumph. Who can venture to speak of that infinitely pathetic scene? The fair city, smiling across the glen, brings before His vision the awful contrast of its lying compassed by armies and in ruins. He hears not the acclamation of the crowd. 'He wept,' or, rather, 'wailed,'—for the word does not imply tears so much as cries. That sorrow is a sign of His real manhood, but it is also a part of His revelation of the very heart of God. The form is human, the substance divine. The man weeps because God pities. Christ's sorrow does not hinder His judgments. The woes which wring His heart will nevertheless be inflicted by Him. Judgment is His 'strange work,' alien from His desires; but it *is* His work. The eyes which are as a flame of fire are filled with tears, but their glance burns up the evil.

Note the yearning in the unfinished sentence, 'If thou hadst known.' Note the decisive closing of the time of repentance. Note the minute prophetic details of the siege, which, if ever they were spoken, are a distinct proof of His all-seeing eye. And from all let

us fix in our hearts the conviction of the pity of the judge, and of the judgment by the pitying Christ.

IV. We have Christ's exercise of sovereign authority in His Father's house. Luke gives but a summary in verses 45-48, dwelling mainly on two points. First he tells of casting out the traders. Two things are brought out in the compressed narrative—the fact, and the Lord's vindication of it. As to the former, it was fitting that at the end of His career, as at the beginning, He should cleanse the Temple. The two events are significant as His first and last acts. The second one, as we gather from the other Evangelists, had a greater severity about it than the first.

The need for a second purifying indicated how sadly transient had been the effect of the first, and was thus evidence of the depth of corruption and formalism to which the religion of priests and people had sunk. Christ had come to cleanse the Temple of the world's religion, to banish from it mercenaries and self-interested attendants at the altar, and, in a higher application of the incident, to clear away all the degradations and uncleannesses which are associated with worship everywhere but in His Church, and which are ever seeking, like poisonous air, to find their way in thither also, through any unguarded chink.

The vindication of the act is in right royal style. The first cleansing was defended by Him by pointing to the sanctity of 'My Father's house'; the second, by claiming it as 'My house.' The rebuke of the hucksters is sterner the second time. The profanation, once driven out and returning, is deeper; for whereas, in the first instance, it had made the Temple 'a house of merchandise,' in the second it turned it into a 'den of robbers.' Thus evil assumes a darker tint, like old

oak, by lapse of time, and swiftly becomes worse, if rebuked and chastised in vain.

The second part of this summary puts in sharp contrast three things—Christ's calm courage in continuous teaching in the Temple, the growing bitter hatred of the authorities, who drew in their train the men of influence holding no office, and the eager hanging of the people on His words, which baffled the murderous designs of the rulers. The same intentional publicity as in the entrance is obvious. Jesus knew that His hour was come, and willingly presents Himself a sacrifice. Meekly and boldly He goes on the appointed way. He sees all the hate working round Him, and lets it work. The day's task of winning some from impending ruin shall still be done. So should His servants live, in patient discharge of daily duty, in the face of death, if need be.

The enemies, who heard His words and found in them only food for deeper hatred, may warn us of the possibilities of antagonism to Him that lie in the heart, and of the terrible judgment which they drag down on their own heads, who hear, unmoved, His daily teaching, and see, unrepentant, His dying love. The crowd that listened, and, in less than a week yelled 'Crucify Him,' may teach us to take heed how we hear, and to beware of evanescent regard for His teaching, which, if it do not consolidate into resolved and thorough-going acceptance of His work and submission to His rule, will certainly cool into disregard, and may harden into hate.



## TENANTS WHO WANTED TO BE OWNERS

'Then began He to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. 10. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. 11. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. 12. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. 13. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. 14. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be our's. 15. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? 16. He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid. 17. And he beheld them, and said, what is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? 18. Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. 19. And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on Him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that He had spoken this parable against them.'—LUKE xx. 9-19.

As the crisis came near, Jesus increased His severity and plainness of speech. This parable, which was spoken very near the end of the protracted duel with the officials in the Temple, is transparent in its application, and hit its mark immediately. The rulers at once perceived that it was directed against them. The cap fitted too well not to be put on. But it contains prophecy as well as history, and the reference to Jesus' impending fate is almost as transparent as the indictment of the rulers, while the prediction of the transference of the vineyard to others is as easy of translation as either of the other points.

Such plain speaking was fitting for last words. The urgency of Christ's pleading love, as much as the intensity of His moral indignation, made them plain.

I. We note, first, the vineyard, its lord and its tenants. The metaphor was familiar, for Isaiah had 'sung a song touching' Israel as God's vineyard, and other prophets had caught up the emblem, so that it had become a

commonplace, known by all. The parable distinctly alludes to Isaiah's words, and almost reproduces them. Matthew's version enlarges on details of the appliances provided by the owner, which makes the parallel with Isaiah still more noticeable. But Luke summarises these into the simple 'planted.' That covers the whole ground.

God had given Israel a system of revelation, law, and worship, which was competent to produce in those who received it, the fruit of obedience and thankfulness. The husbandmen are primarily the rulers, as the scribes and chief priests perceived; but the nation which endorsed, by permitting their action, is included. The picture drawn applies to us as truly as to the Jews. The transference of the vineyard to another set of tenants, which Christ threatened at the close of the parable, has been accomplished, and so we, by our possession of the Gospel, are entrusted with the vineyard, and are responsible for rendering the fruits of holy living and love.

The owner 'let it out, and went into another country for a long time.' That is a picturesque way of saying that we have apparent possession, and are left free to act, God not being manifestly close to us. He stands off, as it were, from the creatures whom He has made, and gives them room to do as they will. But all our possessions, as well as the revelation of Himself in Christ, are only let to us, and we have rent to pay.

The collectors sent for the fruit are, of course, the series of prophets. Luke specifies three—a round number, indicating completeness. He says nothing about the times between their missions, but implies that the three covered the whole period till the sending of the son. Their treatment was uniform, as the

history of Israel proved. The habit of rejecting the prophets was hereditary.

There is such a thing as national solidarity stretching through ages. The bold charge made by Stephen was only an echo of this parable, when he cried, 'As your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?' Each generation made the ancestral sin its own, and staggered under a heavier burden of guilt, till, at last, came a generation which had to bear the penalty of all the blood of prophets shed from the beginning. Nations live, though their component atoms die, and only national repudiation of bequeathed sins can avert the crash which, sooner or later, avenges them.

The husbandmen treated the messengers with increasing contumely and cruelty. Content with beating the first, they added shameful treatment in the second case, and proceeded to wounding in the third. If God's repeated appeals do not melt, they harden, the heart. The persistence of His messengers leads to fiercer hatred, if it does not produce yielding love. There is no bitterness equal to that of the man who has often stiffened conscience against the truth.

II. So far, no doubt could be entertained of the meaning of the scathing parable. There was probably as little about that of the next part. We cannot but notice the broad distinction which Jesus draws between Himself and the mightiest of the prophets. They were the owner's 'slaves'; He was His 'beloved Son.' The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews begins his letter with the same contrast, which he may have learned from the parable. It is a commonplace for us, but let us ponder how it must have sounded to that hostile, eager crowd, and ask ourselves how such assumptions can be recon-

ciled with the 'sweet reasonableness' of Jesus if he belonged to the same category as an Isaiah or a Micah.

The yearning of divine love for the fruit of reverence and obedience is wonderfully expressed by the bold putting of an uncertain hope into the owner's mouth. He must have known that he was running a risk in sending his son, but he so much desires to bring the dishonest workmen back to their duty that he is willing to run it. The highly figurative expression is meant to emphasise God's longing for men's hearts, and His patient love which 'hopeth all things,' and will not cease from effort to win us so long as an arrow remains in His quiver.

III. Our Lord now passes to prophecy. Deep sadness is in His tone as He tells how the only effect of His coming had been to stir up opposition. They 'saw Him,' and were they touched? No, they only gripped their privileges the tighter, and determined more fiercely to assert their ownership.

Nothing is more remarkable in the parable than the calmness of Jesus in announcing His impending fate. He knows it all, and His voice has no tremor, as He tells it as though He were speaking of another. The very announcement that He penetrated the murderous designs hidden in many of the hearers' hearts would tend to precipitate their execution of these; but He is ready for the Cross, and its nearness has no terror, not because He was impassive, or free from the shrinking proper to flesh, but because He was resolved to save. Therefore He was resolved to suffer.

The husbandmen's reasonings with one another bring into plain words thoughts which probably were not consciously held by any even of the rulers. They open the question as to how far the rulers knew the



truth of Christ's claims. They at least knew what these were, and they had fought down dawning convictions which, fairly dealt with, would have broadened into daylight. They would not have been so fiercely antagonistic if they had not been pricked by an uneasy doubt whether, after all, perhaps there was something in these claims.

Nothing steels men against admitting a truth so surely as the suspicion that, if they were to inquire a little farther, they might find themselves believing it. Knowledge and ignorance blended in these rulers as in us all. If they had not known at all, they would not have needed the Saviour's dying prayer for their forgiveness; if they had known fully, its very ground would have been taken away.

The motive put into their mouths is the wish to seize the vineyard for their own; and was not the very soul of the rulers' hostility the determination to keep hold of the prerogatives of their offices, while priests and people alike were deaf to Jesus, because they wished to be no more troubled by being reminded of their obligations to render obedience to God? The root of all rejection of Christ is the desire of self-will to reign supreme. Men resent being reminded that they are tenants, and are determined to assert ownership.

Jesus carries the hearers beyond the final crime which filled the measure of sin, and exhausted the resources of God. The sharp turn from narrative to question, in verse 15, not only is like the sudden thrust of a spear, but marks the transition from the present and immediate future to a more distant day. The slaying of the heir was the last act of the vine-dressers. The owner would act next. Luke, like Mark, puts the threatening of retribution into Christ's lips, while

Matthew makes it the answer of the rulers to his question. Luke alone gives the exclamation, 'God forbid!' The ready answer in Matthew, and the pious interjection in Luke, have the same purpose,—to blunt the application of the parable to themselves by appearing to be unconcerned.

Their levity and reluctance to take home the lesson moved our Lord to sternness, which burned in His steadfast eyes as He looked on them, and must have been remembered by some disciple whose memory has preserved that look for us. It was the prelude to a still less veiled prophecy of the fall of Israel. Jesus lays His hand on the ancient prophecy of the stone rejected by the builders, and applies it to Himself. He is the sure foundation of which Isaiah had spoken. He is the stone rejected by Israel, but elevated to the summit of the building, and there joining two diverging walls.

The solemn warning closing the parable had its special meaning in regard to Israel, but its dread force extends to us. To fall on the stone while it lies lowly on the earth is to lame one's self, but to have it fall on a man when it rushes down from its elevation is ruin utter and irremediable. 'If they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.'

### WHOSE IMAGE AND SUPERScription?

'Whose image and superscription hath it?'—Luke xx. 24.

It is no unusual thing for antagonists to join forces in order to crush a third person obnoxious to both. So in this incident we have an unnatural alliance of the

two parties in Jewish politics who were at daggers drawn. The representatives of the narrow conservative Judaism, which loathed a foreign yoke, in the person of the Pharisees and Scribes, and the Herodians, the partisans of a foreigner and a usurper, lay their heads together to propose a question to Christ which they think will discredit or destroy Him. They would have answered their own question in opposite ways. One would have said, 'It is lawful to give tribute to Cæsar'; the other would have said, 'It is *not*.' But that is a small matter when malice prompts. They calculate, 'If He says, No! we will denounce Him to Pilate as a rebel. If He says, Yes! we will go to the people and say, Here is a pretty Messiah for you, that has no objection to the foreign yoke. Either way we shall end Him.'

Jesus Christ serenely walks through the cobwebs, and lays His hand upon the fact. 'Let Me see a silver penny!'—which, by the bye, was the amount of the tribute—'Whose head is that?' The currency of the country proclaims the monarch of the country. To stamp his image on the coin is an act of sovereignty. 'Cæsar's head declares that you are Cæsar's subjects, whether you like it or not, and it is too late to ask questions about tribute when you pay your bills in his money.' 'Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.'

Does not the other side of Christ's answer—'to God the things that are God's'—rest upon a similar fact? Does not the parallelism require that we should suppose that the destiny of things to be devoted to God is stamped upon them, whatever they are, at least as plainly as the right of Cæsar to exact tribute was inferred from the fact that his money was the currency

of the country? The thought widens out in a great many directions, but I want to confine it to one special line of contemplation, and to take it as suggesting to each of us this great truth, that the very make of men shows that they belong to God, and are bound to yield themselves to Him. If the answer to the question be plain, and the conclusion irresistible, about the penny with the image of Tiberius, the answer is no less plain, nor the conclusion less irresistible, when we turn the interrogation within, and, looking at our own being, say to ourselves, 'Whose image and superscription hath *it* ?'

I. First, then, note the image stamped upon man, and the consequent obligation.

We can very often tell what a thing is for by noticing its make. The instructed eye of an anatomist will, from a bone, divine the sphere in which the creature to whom it belonged was intended to live. Just as plainly as gills or lungs, fins or wings, or legs and arms, declare the element in which the creature that possesses them is intended to move, so plainly stamped upon all our natures is this, that God is our Lord since we are made in a true sense in His image, and that only in Him can we find rest.

I need not remind you, I suppose, of the old word, 'Let us make man in our own image.' Nor need I, I suppose, insist at any length upon the truth that though, by the fact of man's sin, the whole glory and splendour of the divine image in which he was made is marred and defaced, there still remain such solemn, blessed, and awful resemblances between man and God that there can be no mistake as to which beings in the universe are the most kindred; nor any misunderstanding as to who it is after whose likeness we



are formed, and in whose love and life alone we can be blessed.

I am not going to weary you with thoughts for which, perhaps, the pulpit is not the proper place; but let me just remind you of one or two points. Is there any other being on this earth that can say of itself 'I am'? God says '*I am that I am.*' You and I cannot say that, but we alone, in this order of things, possess that solemn and awful gift, the consciousness of our personal being. And, brethren, whoever is able to say to himself 'I am' will never know rest until he can turn to God and say 'Thou art,' and then, laying his hand in the Great Father's hand, venture to say '*We are.*' We are made in His image, in that profoundest of all senses.

But to come to something less recondite. We are like God in that we can love; we are like Him in that we can perceive the right, and that the right is supreme; we are like Him in that we have the power to say 'I will.' And these great capacities demand that the creature who thus knows himself to be, who thus knows the right, who thus can love, who thus can purpose, resolve, and act, should find his home and his refuge in fellowship with God.

But if you take a coin, and compare it with the die from which it has been struck, you will find that wherever in the die there is a relief, in the coin there is a sunken place; and conversely. So there are not only resemblances in man to the divine nature, which bear upon them the manifest marks of his destiny, but there are correspondences, wants, on our side, being met by gifts upon His; hollow emptinesses in us being filled, when we are brought into contact with Him, by the abundance of His outstanding supplies and

gifts. So the poorest, narrowest, meanest life has in it a depth of desire, an ardour, and sometimes a pain and a madness of yearning and longing which nothing but God can fill. Though we often misunderstand the voice, and so make ourselves miserable by vain efforts, our 'heart and our flesh,' in every fibre of our being, 'cry out for the living God.' And what we all want is some one Pearl of great price into which all the dispersed preciousness and fragmentary brilliances that dazzle the eye shall be gathered. We want a Person, a living Person, a present Person, a sufficient Person, who shall satisfy our hearts, our whole hearts, and that at one and the same time, or else we shall never be at rest.

Because, then, we are made dependent, because we possess these wild desires, because immortal thirst attaches to our nature, because we have consciences that need illuminating, wills that are only free when they are absolutely submissive, hearts that are dissatisfied, and left yearning, after all the sweetnesses of limited, transient, and creatural affections, we bear on our very fronts the image of God; and any man that wisely looks at himself can answer the question, 'Whose image and superscription hath it?' in but one way. 'In the image of God created He him.'

Therefore by loving fellowship, by lowly trust, by ardour of love, by submissiveness of obedience, by continuity of contemplation, by the sacrifice of self, we must yield ourselves to God if we would pay the tribute manifestly owing to the Emperor by the fact that His image and superscription are upon the coin.

II. And so let me ask you to look, in the next place, at the defacement of the image and the wrong expenditure of the coin.

You sometimes get into your hands money on which there has been stamped, by mischief, or for some selfish purpose, the name of some one else than the king's or queen's which surrounds the head upon it. And in like manner our nature has gone through the stamping-press again, and another likeness has been deeply imprinted upon it. The image of God, which every man has, is in some senses and aspects ineffaceable by any course of conduct of theirs. But in another aspect it is not like the permanent similitude stamped upon the solid metal of the penny, but like the reflection, rather, that falls upon some polished plate, or that is cast upon the white sheet from a lantern. If the polished plate be rusty and stained, the image is faint and indistinct; if it be turned away from the light the image passes. And that is what some of you are doing. By living to yourselves, by living day in and day out without ever remembering God, by yielding to passions, lusts, ambitions, low desires, and the like, you are doing your very best to erase the likeness which still lingers in your nature. Is there any one here that has yielded to some lust of the flesh, some appetite, drunkenness, gluttony, impurity, or the like, and has so sold himself to it, as that that part of the divine image, the power of saying 'I will,' has pretty nearly gone? I am afraid there must be some who, by long submission to passion, have lost the control that reason and conscience and a firm steady purpose ought to give. Is there any man here who, by long course of utter neglect of the divine love, has ceased to feel that there is a heart at the centre of the universe, or that He has anything to do with it? Brethren, the awful power that is given to men of degrading themselves till, lineament by line-

ament, the likeness in which they are made vanishes, is the saddest and most tragical thing in the world. 'Like the beasts that perish,' says one of the psalms, the men become who, by the acids and the files of worldliness and sensuality and passion, have so rubbed away the likeness of God that it is scarcely perceptible in them. Do I speak to some such now? If there is nothing else left there is this, a hunger for absolute good and for the satisfaction of your desires. That is part of the proof that you are made for God, and that only in Him can you find rest.

All occupations of heart and mind and will and active life with other things to the exclusion of supreme devotion to God are, then, sacrilege and rebellion. The emperor's head was the token of sovereignty and carried with it the obligation to pay tribute. Every fibre in your nature protests against the prostitution of itself to anything short of God. You remember the story in the Old Testament about that saturnalia or debauchery, the night when Babylon fell, when Belshazzar, in the very wantonness of godless insolence, could not be satisfied with drinking his wine out of anything less sacred than the vessels that had been brought from the Temple at Jerusalem. That is what many of us are doing, taking the sacred cup which is meant to be filled with the wine of the kingdom and pouring into it the foaming but poisonous beverages which steal away our brains and make us drunk, the moment before our empire totters to its fall and we to our ruin. 'All the consecrated things of the house of the Lord they dedicated to Baal,' says one of the narratives in the Book of Chronicles. That is what some of us are doing, taking the soul that is meant to be consecrated to God and find its blessedness



there, and offering it to false gods in whose service there is no blessedness.

For, dear friends, I beseech you, lay this to heart that you cannot thus use the Godlike being that you possess without bringing down upon your heads miseries and unrest. The raven, that black bird of evil omen, went out from the ark, and flew homeless over the weltering ocean. The souls that seek not God fly thus, strangers and restless, through a drowned and lifeless world. The dove came back with an olive branch in its beak. Souls that are wise and have made their nests in the sanctuary can there fold their wings and be at peace. As the ancient saint said, 'We are made for God, and only in God have we rest.' 'Oh, that thou hadst hearkened to me, then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.' Cannot you see the blessed, gentle gliding of the full stream through the meadows with the sun-Glne upon its ripples? Such is the heart that has yielded itself to God. In solemn contrast to that lovely image, the same prophet has for a repeated refrain in his book, 'The wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest,' but goes moaning round the world, and breaking in idle foam upon every shore, and still is unquiet for evermore. Brethren, only when we render to God the thing that is God's—our hearts and ourselves—have we repose.

III. Now, lastly, notice the restoration and perfecting of the defaced image.

Because man is like God, it is possible for God to become like man. The possibility of Revelation and of Redemption by an incarnate Saviour depend upon the reality of the fact that man is made in the image of God. Thus there comes to us that divine Christ,

who lays 'His hands upon both,' and being on the one hand the express image of His person, so that He can say, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' on the other hand 'was in all points made like unto His brethren,' with only the exception that the defacement which had obliterated the divine image in them left it clear, untarnished, and sharply cut in Him.

'Therefore, because Jesus Christ has come, our Brother, 'bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,' made like unto us, and in our likeness presenting to us the very image of God and radiation of His light, therefore no defacement that it is possible for men or devils to make on this poor humanity of ours need be irrevocable and final. All the stains may be blotted out, all the usurping superscriptions may be removed and the original imprint restored. The dints may be elevated, the too lofty points may be lowered, the tarnish and the rust may be rubbed off, and, fairer than before, the likeness of God may be stamped on every one of us, 'after the image of Him that created us,' if only we will turn ourselves to that dear Lord, and cast our souls upon Him. Christ hath become like us that we might become like Him, and therein be partakers of the divine nature. 'We all, reflecting as a glass does the glory of the Lord, may be changed into the same image from glory to glory.'

Nor do the possibilities stop there, for we look forward to a time when, if I might pursue the metaphor of my text, the coinage shall be called in and reminted, in new forms of nobleness and of likeness. We have before us this great prospect, that 'we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is'; and in all the glories of that heaven we shall partake, for all that is Christ's is ours, and 'we that have borne the

image of the earthly shall also bear the image of the heavenly.'

I come to you, then, with this old question: 'Whose image and superscription hath it?' and the old exhortation founded thereupon: 'Render therefore to God the thing that is God's'; and yield yourselves to Him. Another question I would ask, and pray that you may lay it to heart, 'To what purpose is this waste?' What are you doing with the silver penny of your own soul? Wherefore do ye 'spend it for that which is not bread?' Give yourselves to God; trust yourselves to the Christ who is like you, and like Him. And, resting upon His great love you will be saved from the prostitution of capacities, and the vain attempts to satisfy your souls with the husks of earth; and whilst you remain here will be made partakers of Christ's life, and growingly of His likeness, and when you remove yonder, your body, soul, and spirit will be conformed to His image, and transformed into the likeness of His glory, 'according to the mighty working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.'

### WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE?

'And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. 21. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. 22. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. 23. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. 24. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. 25. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; 26. Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. 27. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory. 28. And when these things begin to come to pass, then

look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. 29. And He spake to them a parable; Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; 30. When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. 31. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. 32. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled. 33. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away. 34. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. 35. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.'—LUKE XXI. 20-36.

THIS discourse of our Lord's is in answer to the disciples' double question as to the time of the overthrow of the Temple and the premonitory signs of its approach. The former is answered with the indefiniteness which characterises prophetic chronology; the latter is plainly answered in verse 20.

The whole passage divides itself in four well-marked sections.

I. There is the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem (vs. 20-24). The 'sign' of her 'desolation' was to be the advance of the enemy to her walls. Armies had been many times encamped round her, and many times been scattered; but this siege was to end in capture, and no angel of the Lord would stalk by night through the sleeping host, to stiffen sleep into death, nor would any valour of the besieged avail. Their cause was to be hopeless from the first. Flight was enjoined. Usually the inhabitants of the open country took refuge in the fortified capital when invasion harrowed their fields; but this time, for 'them that are in the country' to 'enter therein' was to throw away their last chance of safety. The Christians obeyed, and fled, as we all know, across Jordan to Pella. The rest despised Jesus' warning—if they knew it,—and perished.

Mark the reason for the exhortation not to resist,



but to flee: 'These are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.' That is to say, the besiegers are sent by God to execute His righteous and long-ago-pronounced judgments. Therefore it is vain to struggle against them. Behind the Roman army is the God of Israel. To dash against their cohorts is to throw one's self on the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler, and none who dare do that can 'prosper.' Submission to His retributive hand is the only way to escape being crushed by it. Chastisement accepted is salutary, but kicking against it drives the goad deeper into the rebellious limb.

So great is the agony to be, that what should be a joy, the birth of children, will be a woe, and the sweet duties of motherhood a curse, while the childless will be happier than the fugitives burdened with helpless infancy. We should note, too, that the 'distress' which comes upon the land is presented in darker colours, and traced to its origin, in (God's) 'wrath' dealt out 'unto this people.' Happier they who 'fall by the edge of the sword' than they who are led 'captive into all the nations.'

A gleam of hope shoots through the stormy prospect, for the treading down of Jerusalem by the Gentiles has a term set to it. It is to continue 'till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.' That expression is important, for it clearly implies that these 'times' are of considerable duration, and it thus places a period of undefined extent between the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent prophecy. The word used for 'times' generally carries with it the notion of opportunity, and here seems to indicate that the break-up of the Jewish national existence would usher in a period in which the 'Gentiles' would have the kingdom of God offered

to them. The history of the world since the city fell is the best comment on this saying.

II. Since the 'times of the Gentiles' are thus of indefinite duration, they make a broad line of demarcation between what precedes and what follows them. Clearly the prophecy in verses 25-27 is separated in time from the fall of Jerusalem, and it is no objection to that view that the separation is not more emphatically pointed out by our Lord. These verses distinctly refer to His last coming to judgment. Verse 27 is too grand and too distinctly cast in the mould of the other predictions of that coming to be interpreted of His ideal coming in the judgments on the city.

The 'signs in sun and moon and stars' may refer in accordance with a familiar symbolism, to the overthrow of royalties and dominions; the sea roaring may, in like manner, symbolise agitations among the people; but the 'cloud' and the 'power and great glory' with which the Son of man comes, can mean nothing else than what they mean in other prophetic passages; namely, His visible appearance, invested with the shekinah light, and wielding divine authority before the gaze of a world.

The city's fall, then, was the initial stage of a process, the duration of which is undefined here, but implied to be considerable, and of which the closing stage is the personal coming of Jesus. The same conclusion is supported by verse 28, which treats that fall as the beginning of the fulfilment of the prophecy.

III. That verse forms a transition to the section containing the illustrative parable and the reiteration of the assurance that Christ's words would certainly be fulfilled. The disciples might naturally quake at the prospect, and wonder how they could face the reality.

Jesus gives them strong words of cheer, which apply to all dreaded contingencies and to all social convulsions. What is a messenger of destruction to Christless men and institutions is a harbinger of full 'redemption' to His servants. Earthquakes but open their prison doors and loose their bands, they should not shake their hearts.

Historically the fall of Jerusalem was a powerful factor in the deliverance of the Church from Jewish swaddling-bands which hampered its growing limbs. For all Christians the destruction of what can perish brings fuller vision and possession of what cannot be shaken. To Christ's friends, all things work for good. So the parable which at first sight seems strangely incongruous becomes blessedly significant and fitting. The gladsome blossoming of the trees, the herald of the glories of summer, is a strange emblem of such a tragedy, and summer itself is a still stranger one of that solemn last judgment. But the might of humble trust in Him who comes to judge makes His coming summer-like in the light and warmth with which it floods the soul, and the rich fruitage which it produces there.

Observe, too, that the parable confirms the idea of a process having stages, for the lesson of the blossoming fig-tree is not that summer has come, but that it is nigh.

The solemn assurance in verse 32, made more weighty by the 'Verily I say,' seems at first sight to bring the final judgment within the lifetime of the generation of the hearers. But it is noteworthy that the expression 'till all things are fulfilled' is almost verbally identical with that in verse 22, which refers only to the destruction of Jerusalem, and is therefore most naturally interpreted as having the same restricted application

here. The difference between the two phrases is significant, since in the former the certainty of fulfilment is deduced from the fact of 'the things' being written—that is, they must be accomplished because they have been foretold in Scripture,—whereas in the latter Christ rests the certainty of fulfilment on His own word. That majestic assurance in verse 33 comes well from His lips, and makes claim that His word shall outlast the whole present material order, and be fulfilled in every detail. Think of a mere man saying that!

IV. Exhortations corresponding to the predictions follow. Christ's revelation of the future was neither meant to gratify idle curiosity nor to supply a timetable in advance, but to minister encouragement and to lead to watchfulness. Whether 'that day' (ver. 34) is understood of the fall of Jerusalem or of the final coming of the Lord, it will come 'as a snare' upon men who are absorbed with the earth which they inhabit. They will be captured by it, as a covey of birds in a field busily picking up grain, are netted by one sudden fling of the fowler's net. A wary eye would have saved them.

The exhortation is as applicable to us, for, whatever are our views about an fulfilled prophecy, death comes to us all at a time which we know not, as the Book of Ecclesiastes, using the same figure, says; 'Man knoweth not his time . . . as the birds that are caught in the snare.' Hearts must be kept above the grosser satisfactions of sense and the less gross cares of life, being neither stupefied with gorging earth's good, nor pre-occupied with its gnawing anxieties, both of which are destructive of the clear realisation of the certain future. We are to preserve an attitude of wakefulness and of expectancy, and, as the sure way to it, and to clearing our hearts of perishable delights and short-



sighted, self-consuming cares, we are to keep them in a continual posture of supplication. If our study of unfulfilled prophecy does that for us, it will have done what Jesus means it to do; if it does not it matters little what theories about its chronology we may adopt.

The two stages which we have tried to point out in this passage are clearly marked at the close, where escaping 'all these things that shall come to pass' and standing 'before the Son of man' are distinguished. True, both stages were to be included in the experience of Christ's hearers, but they are none the less separate stages.

Luke's version of this great discourse gives less prominence to the final coming than does Matthew's, and does not blend the two stages so inextricably together; but it gives no hint of the duration of the 'times of the Gentiles,' and might well leave the impression that these were brief. Now in this close setting together of a nearer and a much more remote future, with little prominence given to the interval between, our Lord is but bringing His prophecy into line with the constant manner of the older prophets. They and He paint the future in perspective, and the distance, seen behind the foreground, seems nearer than it really is. The spectator does not know how many weary miles have to be traversed before the distant blue hills are to be reached, nor what deep gorges lie between.

Such bringing together of events far apart in time of fulfilment rests in part on the fact that there have been many 'days of the Lord,' many 'comings of Christ,' each of which is a result on a small scale of the same retributive action of the Judge of all, as shall be manifested on the largest scale in the last and greatest day of the Lord. Therefore the true use of all these predictions is that which Christ enforces here; namely,

that they should lead us to prayerful watchfulness and to living above earth, its goods and cares.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

'Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. 8. And He sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. 9. And they said unto Him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? 10. And He said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. 11. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with My disciples? 12. And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. 13. And they went, and found as He had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. 14. And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. 15. And He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: 16. For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. 17. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: 18. For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. 19. And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me. 20. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you.'—LUKE xxii. 7-20.

PAUL had his account of the Last Supper direct from Christ. Luke apparently had his from Paul, so that the variations from Matthew and Mark are invested with singular interest, as probably traceable to the Lord of the feast Himself. Our passage has three sections—the preparation, the revelation of Christ's heart, and the institution of the rite.

I. The Preparation.—Peculiar to Luke are the names of the disciples entrusted with it, and the representation of the command, as preceding the disciples' question 'Where?' The selection of Peter and John indicates the confidential nature of the task, which comes out still more plainly in the singular directions given to them. Luke's order of command and question seems more precise than that of the other Gospels, as making our Lord the originator instead of merely responsive to the disciples' suggestion.

How is the designation of the place which Christ gives to be understood? Was it supernatural knowledge, or was it the result of previous arrangement with the 'goodman of the house'? Most probably the latter; for he was in so far a disciple that he recognised Jesus as 'the Master,' and was glad to have Him in his house, and the chamber on the roof was ready 'furnished' when they came. Why this mystery about the place? The verses before our passage tell the reason.

Judas was listening, too, for the answer to 'Where?' thinking that it would give him the 'opportunity' which he sought 'to betray Him in the absence of the multitude.' Jesus had much to say to His disciples, and needed the quiet hours in the upper room, and therefore sent away the two with directions which revealed nothing to the others. If He had told the group where the house was, the last supper might never have been instituted, nor the precious farewell words, the holy of holies of John's Gospel, ever been spoken. Jesus takes precautions to delay the Cross. He takes none to escape it, but rather sets Himself in these last days to bring it near. The variety in His action means no change in His mind, but both modes are equally the result of His self-forgetting love to us all. So He sends away Peter and John with sealed orders, as it were, and the greedy ears of the traitor are balked, and none know the appointed place till Jesus leads them to it. The two did not come back, but Christ guided the others to the house, when the hour was come.

II. Verses 14-18 give a glimpse into Christ's heart as He partook, for the last time, of the Passover. He discloses His earnest desire for that last hour of calm before He went out to face the storm, and reveals His vision of the future feast in the perfect kingdom. That

desire touchingly shows His brotherhood in all our shrinking from parting with dear ones, and in our treasuring of the last sweet, sad moments of being together. That was a true human heart, 'fashioned alike' with ours, which longed and planned for one quiet hour before the end, and found some bracing for Gethsemane and Calvary in the sanctities of the Upper Room. But the desire was not for Himself only. He wished to partake of that Passover, and then to transform it for ever, and to leave the new rite to His servants.

Our Lord evidently ate of the Passover; for we cannot suppose that His words in verse 15 relate to an ungratified wish, but, as evidently, that eating was finished before He spoke. We shall best conceive the course of events if we suppose that the earlier stages of the paschal ceremonial were duly attended to, and that the Lord's Supper was instituted in connection with its later parts. We need not discuss what was the exact stage at which our Lord spoke and acted as in verses 15-17. It is sufficient to note that in them He gives what He does not taste, and that, in giving, His thoughts travel beyond all the sorrow and death to reunion and perfected festal joys. These anticipations solaced His heart in that supreme hour. 'For the joy that was set before Him' He 'endured the Cross,' and this was the crown of His joy, that all His friends should share it with Him, and sit at His table in His kingdom.

The prophetic aspect of the Lord's Supper should never be left out of view. It is at once a feast of memory and of hope, and is also a symbol for the present, inasmuch as it represents the conditions of spiritual life as being participation in the body and blood of Christ. This is where Paul learned his 'till He



come'; and that hope which filled the Saviour's heart should ever fill ours when we remember His death.

III. Verses 19 and 20 record the actual institution of the Lord's Supper. Note its connection with the rite which it transforms. The Passover was the memorial of deliverance, the very centre of Jewish ritual. It was a family feast, and our Lord took the place of the head of the household. That solemnly appointed and long-observed memorial of the deliverance which made a mob of slaves into a nation is transfigured by Jesus, who calls upon Jew and Gentile to forget the venerable meaning of the rite, and remember rather His work for all men. It is strange presumption thus to brush aside the Passover, and in effect to say, 'I abrogate a divinely enjoined ceremony, and breathe a new meaning into so much of it as I retain.' Who is He who thus tampers with God's commandments? Surely He is either One having a co-ordinate authority, or——? But perhaps the alternative is best left unspoken.

The separation of the symbols of the body and blood plainly indicates that it is the death of Jesus, and that a violent one, which is commemorated. The double symbol carries in both its parts the same truth, but with differences. Both teach that all our hopes are rooted in the death of Jesus, and that the only true life of our spirits comes from participation in His death, and thereby in His life. But in addition to this truth common to both, the wine, which represents His blood, is the seal of the 'new covenant.' Again we mark the extraordinary freedom with which Christ handles the most sacred parts of the former revelation, putting them aside as He wills, to set Himself in their place. He declares, by this rite, that through His death a new 'covenant' comes into force as between God and man,

in which all the anticipations of prophets are more than realised, and sins are remembered no more, and the knowledge of God becomes the blessing of all, and a close relationship of mutual possession is established between God and us, and His laws are written on loving hearts and softened wills.

Nor is even this all the meaning of that cup of blessing; for blood is the vehicle of life, and whoso receives Christ's blood on his conscience, to sprinkle it from dead works, therein receives, not only cleansing for the past, but a real communication of 'the Spirit of life' which was 'in Christ' to be the life of his life, so as that he can say, 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Nor is even this all; for, as wine is, all the world over, the emblem of festivity, so this cup declares that to partake of Christ is to have a fountain of joy in ourselves, which yet has a better source than ourselves. Nor is this all; for 'this cup' is prophecy as well as memorial and symbol, and shadows the new wine of the kingdom and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

'This is My body' could not have meant to the hearers, who saw Him sitting there in bodily form, anything but 'this is a symbol of My body.' It is but the common use of the word in explaining a figurative speech or act. 'The field is the world; the tares are the children of the wicked one; the reapers are the angels,'—and so in a hundred cases.

Luke alone preserves for us the command to 'do this,' which at once establishes the rite as meant to be perpetual, and defines the true nature of it. It is a memorial, and, if we are to take our Lord's own explanation, only a memorial. There is nothing here of sacramental efficacy, but simply the loving desire to

be remembered and the condescending entrusting of some power to recall him to these outward symbols. Strange that, if the communion were so much more, as the sacramentarian theory makes it, the feast's own Founder should not have said a word to hint that it was.

And how deep and yet lowly an insight into His hold on our hearts the institution of this ordinance shows Him to have had! The Greek is, literally, 'In order to My remembrance.' He knew that—strange and sad as it may seem, and impossible as, no doubt, it did seem to the disciples—we should be in constant danger of forgetting Him; and therefore, in this one case, He enlists sense on the side of faith, and trusts to these homely memorials the recalling, to our treacherous memories, of His dying love. He wished to live in our hearts, and that for the satisfaction of His own love and for the deepening of ours.

The Lord's Supper is a standing evidence of Christ's own estimate of where the centre of His work lies. We are to remember His death. Why should it be selected as the chief treasure for memory, unless it was something altogether different from the death of other wise teachers and benefactors? If it were in His case what it is in all others, the end of His activity for blessing, and no part of His message to the world, what need is there for the Lord's Supper, and what meaning is there in it, if Christ's death were not the sacrifice for the world's sin? Surely no view of the significance and purpose of the Cross but that which sees in it the propitiation for the world's sins accounts for this rite. A Christianity which strikes the atoning death of Jesus out of its theology is sorely embarrassed to find a worthy meaning for His dying command, 'This do in remembrance of Me.'

But if the breaking of the precious alabaster box of His body was needful in order that 'the house' might be 'filled with the odour of the ointment,' and if His death was the indispensable condition of pardon and impartation of His life, then 'wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there,' as its vital centre, shall His death be proclaimed, and this rite shall speak of it for a memorial of Him, and 'show the Lord's death till He come.'

## PARTING PROMISES AND WARNINGS

'And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. 25. And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. 26. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. 27. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as He that serveth. 28. Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. 29. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; 30. That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 31. And the Lord said, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: 32. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. 33. And he said unto Him, Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death. 34. And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me. 35. And He said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. 36. Then said He unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. 37. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, And He was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end.'—LUKE xxii. 24-37.

It was blameworthy, but only too natural, that, while Christ's heart was full of His approaching sufferings, the Apostles should be squabbling about their respective dignity. They thought that the half-understood predictions pointed to a brief struggle immediately preceding the establishment of the kingdom, and they wished to have their rank settled in advance. Possibly, too, they had been disputing as to whose office



was the menial task of presenting the basin for foot-washing. So little did the first partakers of the Lord's Supper 'discern the Lord's body,' and so little did His most loving friends share His sorrows.

I. Our Lord was not so absorbed in His anticipations of the near Cross as to be unobservant of the wrangling among the Apostles. Even then His heart was enough at leisure from itself to observe, to pity, and to help. So He at once turns to deal with the false ideas of greatness betrayed by the dispute. The world's notion is that the true use and exercise of superiority is to lord it over others. Tyrants are flattered by the title of benefactor, which they do not deserve, but the giving of which shows that, even in the world, some trace of the true conception lingers. It was sadly true, at that time, that power was used for selfish ends, and generally meant oppression. One Egyptian king, who bore the title Benefactor, was popularly known as Malefactor, and many another old-world monarch deserved a like name.

Jesus lays down the law for His followers as being the exact opposite of the world's notion. Dignity and pre-eminence carry obligations to serve. In His kingdom power is to be used to help others, not to glorify oneself. In other sayings of Christ's, service is declared to be the way to *become* great in the kingdom, but here the matter is taken up at another point, and greatness, already attained on whatever grounds, is commanded to be turned to its proper use. The way to become great is to become small, and to serve. The right use of greatness is to become a servant. That has become a familiar commonplace now, but its recognition as the law for civic and other dignity is all but entirely owing to Christianity. What concep-

tion of such a use of power has the Sultan of Turkey, or the petty tyrants of heathen lands? The worst of European rulers have to make pretence to be guided by this law; and even the Pope calls himself 'the servant of servants.'

It is a commonplace, but like many another axiom, universal acceptance and almost as universal neglect are its fate. Ingrained selfishness fights against it. Men admire it as a beautiful saying, and how many of us take it as our life's guide? We condemn the rulers of old who wrung wealth out of their people and neglected every duty; but what of our own use of the fraction of power we possess, or our own demeanour to our inferiors in world or church? Have all the occupants of royal thrones or presidential chairs, all peers, members of Parliament, senators, and congressmen, used their position for the public weal? Do we regard ours as a trust to be administered for others? Do we feel the weight of our crown, or are we taken up with its jewels, and proud of ourselves for it? Christ's pathetic words, giving Himself as the example of greatness that serves, are best understood as referring to His wonderful act of washing the disciples' feet. Luke does not record it, and probably did not know it, but how the words are lighted up if we bring them into connection with it!

II. Verses 28 to 30 naturally flow from the preceding. They lift a corner of the veil, and show the rewards, when the heavenly form of the kingdom has come, of the right use of eminence in its earthly form. How pathetic a glimpse into Christ's heart is given in that warm utterance of gratitude for the imperfect companionship of the Twelve! It reveals His loneliness, His yearning for a loving hand to grasp, His

continual conflict with temptations to choose an easier way than that of the Cross. He has known all the pain of being alone, and feeling in vain for a sympathetic heart to lean on. He has had to resist temptation, not only in the desert at the beginning, or in Gethsemane at the end, but throughout His life. He treasures in His heart, and richly repays, even a little love dashed with much selfishness, and faithfulness broken by desertion. We do not often speak of the tempted Christ, or of the lonely Christ, or of the grateful Christ, but in these great words we see Him as being all these.

The rewards promised point onwards to the perfecting of the kingdom in the future life. We notice the profound thought that the kingdom which His servants are to inherit is conferred on them, '*as My Father hath appointed unto Me,*'—that is, that it is a kingdom won by suffering and service, and wielded by gentleness and for others. '*If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.*' The characteristics of the future royalty of Christ's servants are given in highly figurative language. A state of which we have no experience can only be revealed under forms drawn from experience; but these are only far-off approximations, and cannot be pressed.

The sacred Last Supper suggested one metaphor. It was the last on earth, but its sanctity would be renewed in heaven, and sadness and separation and the following grief would not mar the perfect, perpetual, joyful feast. What dim visions of rule and delegated authority may lie in the other promise of judging the twelve tribes of Israel, we must wait till we go to that world to understand. But this is clear, that continuing with Jesus here leads to everlasting

companionship hereafter, in which all desires shall be satisfied, and we shall share in His authority and be representatives of His glory.

III. But Jesus abruptly recalls Himself and the Twelve from these remoter prospects of bliss to the nearer future of trial and separation. The solemn warning to Peter follows with startling suddenness. Why should they be fighting about precedence when they were on the verge of the severest trial of their constancy? And as for Peter, who had, no doubt, not been the least loud-voiced in the strife, he needed most of all to be sobered. Our narrow limits forbid our doing even partial justice to the scene with him; but we note the significant use of the old name 'Simon,' reminding the Apostle of his human weakness, and its repetition, giving emphasis to the address.

We note, too, the partial withdrawal of the veil which hides the spirit world from us, in the distinct declaration of the agency of a personal tempter, whose power is limited, though his malice is boundless, and who had to obtain God's permission ere he could tempt. His sieve is made to let the wheat through, and to retain the chaff. It will be hard to empty this saying of its force. Christ taught the existence and operation of Satan; but He taught, too, that He Himself was Satan's victorious antagonist and our prevailing intercessor. He is so still. He does not seek to avert conflict from us, but prays that our faith fail not, and Himself, too, fulfils the prayer by strengthening us.

Faith, then, conquers, and withstands Satan's sifting. If it holds out, we shall not fall, though all the winds howl round us. We are not passive between the two antagonists, but have to take our share in the



struggle. Partial failures may be followed by recovery, and even tend to increase our power to strengthen other tempted ones, by the experience gained of our own weakness, which deepens humility and forbearance with others' faults, and by the experience of Christ's strength, which makes us able to direct them to the source of all safety.

Peter's passionate avowal of readiness to bear anything, if only he was with Christ, is the genuine utterance of a warm impulsive heart, which took too little heed of Christ's solemn warning, and fancied that the tide of present feeling would always run as strong as now. Emotion fluctuates. Steadfast devotion is chary of mortgaging the future by promises. He who knows himself is slow to say, 'I will,' for he knows that 'Oh that I may!' is fitter for his weakness. Very likely, if Peter had been offered fetters or the scaffold then and there, he would have accepted them bravely; but it was a different thing in the raw, cold morning, after an agitating night, and the Master away at the far end of the great hall. A flippant maid's tongue was enough to finish him then.

It is sometimes easier to bear a great load for Christ than a small one. Some of us could be martyrs at the stake more easily than confessors among sneering neighbours. Jesus had spared the Apostle in the former warning of his fall, but He spoke plainly at last, since the former had been ineffectual; and He addressed him by his new name of Peter, as if to heighten the sin of denial by recalling the privileges bestowed.

IV. The last part of the passage deals with the new conditions consequent on Christ's departure. The Twelve had been exempt from the care of providing

for themselves while He was with them, but now they are to be launched into the world alone, like fledglings from the nest. Not that His presence is not with them or with us, but that His absence throws the task of providing for wants and guarding against dangers on themselves, as had not been the case during the blessed years of companionship. Hence the injunctions in verse 36 lay down the permanent law for the Church, while verse 37 assigns as its reason the speedy fulfilment of the prophecies of Messiah's sufferings.

Substantially the meaning of the whole is: 'I am on the point of leaving you, and, when I am gone, you must use common-sense means for provision and protection. I provided for you while I was here, without your co-operation. Remember how I did so, and trust Me to provide in future, through your co-operation.'

The life of faith does not exclude ordinary prudence and the use of appropriate means. It is more in accord with Christ's mind to have a purse to keep money in, and a wallet for food-stores, than to go out, as some good people do, saying, 'The Lord will provide.' Yes, He will; but it will be by blessing your common-sense and effort. As to the difficulty felt in the injunction to buy a sword, our Lord would be contradicting His whole teaching if He was here commanding the use of arms for the defence of His servants or the promotion of His kingdom. That He did not mean literal swords is plain from His answer to the Apostles, who produced the formidable armament of two.

'It is enough.' A couple are plenty to fight the Roman Empire with. Yes, two too many, as was soon seen. The expression is plainly an intensely energetic metaphor, taking line with purse and scrip. The plain

meaning of the whole is that we are called on to provide necessary means of provision and defence, which He will bless. The only sword permitted to His followers is the sword of the Spirit.

### CHRIST'S IDEAL OF A MONARCH<sup>1</sup>

'And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. 26. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.'—LUKE xxii. 25-26.

THERE have been sovereigns of England whose death was a relief. There have been others who were mourned with a certain tepid and decorous regret. But there has never been one on whose bier have been heaped such fragrant wreaths of universal love and sorrow as have been laid upon hers whom we have not yet learned to call by another name than that which has been musical for all these years—the Queen. Why has her people's love thus compassed her? Surely, chiefly because they felt and saw that Christ's ideal of rule, as stated in these words of our text, was her ideal, which she had gone far to realise. Here is the secret of her hold upon her people. Here is the reason why, from almost all the world, tributes have come, and as has been well said, 'They that loved not England loved her.'

Now it would be impossible for me to speak words remote from the thought that has been filling the nation's mind in these days. I can add nothing to the many eloquent and just appreciations to which we have listened in this past week, but I can draw your attention to the underlying secret which moulded and shaped that life. And it becomes the pulpit to do so.

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the occasion of the death of Queen Victoria.

We Christians ought to infuse a Christian element into everything. We should 'not sorrow as others,' nor should we admire as others. We all unite in praising her, but eulogiums which ignore the ground of the virtues which they extol are superficial and misleading. I ask you to turn to the revelation of the secret of the nation's love and sorrow suggested by the words of my text.

Christ sets forth, in two sharply contrasted pictures, the world's ideal of a king and His ideal. The upper room was a strange place, and the eve of Calvary was a still stranger time, for disciples to squabble about pre-eminence. The Master was absorbed in the thought of His Cross, the servants were quarrelling about their places in His Kingdom. Perhaps it was the foot-washing that brought about the unseemly strife that arose among them, each desiring to hand on the menial office to another. Jesus Christ did it Himself; and to that, perhaps, refer the touching words which Luke gives as following the text; 'I am among you as he that serveth,' with the towel round His loins, and the basin in His hand.

#### The world's ideal of a King.

Now, the one picture which He draws for us here, the world's ideal of a king, is the 'portrait familiar enough to all who know anything about that ancient order of society, of tyrants and despots, in Assyria, Babylonia. Pharaohs and all the little kings round about Judæa; the vile old Herod and his equally vile brood, were recent or living examples of what the Master said when He sketched 'the kings of the Gentiles.' They 'lord it over them.' Arrogant superiority, imperious masterfulness, irresponsible wills, caprices ungoverned, an absolute oblivion of duties,



no thought of responsibilities—these were the features of that ancient type of monarch: and which, in spite of all constitutional hedges and limitations, there is abundant room for the repetition of, even in so-called Christian countries.

And then, side by side with that, comes another characteristic: ‘They that exercise authority upon them are called “benefactors.”’ They demand titles which shall credit them with virtues that they never try to possess, and live in a region filled with the fumes from a thousand venal censers of a flattery which intoxicates and makes giddy. A king in Egypt, very near our Lord’s time, had borne the title ‘benefactor,’ the very word that is employed here; even as many a most ungracious sovereign has been called ‘Your Most Gracious Majesty.’

The position tempts to such a type. And although the world has outgrown it, yet, as I have said, there is ample room for the recurrence to the old and obsolete form, unless a mightier hindrance than human nature knows, come in to prevent it. An ancient prophet lamented over the shepherds of Israel ‘that do feed themselves,’ and indignantly asked, ‘should not the shepherds feed the sheep?’ He meant precisely the same contrast which is drawn out at length in these two pictures that we have before us now.

The Christian conception.

‘Ye shall not be so.’ The Christian conception is in sharp contrast to, and the Christian realisation of the conception, should be the absolute opposite of that type to which I have already referred. ‘He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger’; that suggests modesty and meekness of demeanour in bearing the loftiest office. ‘And he

that is chief as he that doth serve'; that expresses an activity, not self-regarding and self-centred, but ever used for others. The simple words of Jesus Christ are the noblest expression of, and, as I believe, have been the mightiest impulse in producing, the modern recognition which, thank God! is becoming more and more pronounced every day amongst us, that power means duty, that elevation means the obligation to stoop, that true authority expresses itself in service. We see that conviction growing in all classes in England. Those who are lifted high are learning to-day, as they never learned before, the responsibilities and obligations of their position. And those who are low are beginning to apply the principle as they never did before, and to test the worthiness of the lofty, highly-endowed, wealthy, and noble, by their discharge of the obligations of their position. And although it anticipates what I have to say subsequently, I cannot but ask here, who shall say how the Queen's example of authority becoming service has steadied the Empire, and made a peaceful transition from the old type of authority to the new, a possibility? Although not directly stated in my text, there is implied in it another thought, namely, that whilst power obliges to service, service brings power. He that uses his influence, his authority, his capacities, his possessions, not for himself, but for his brothers, will find that by the service he has garnered in a harvest of authority, and power of command which nothing else can ever give.

Christ's ideal of a monarch.

And now I may turn, without passing beyond the bounds of the pulpit on such an occasion as the present, to look at the great illustration of the Christian ideal which the royal life now closed has given. I venture

to say that, without exaggeration, and without irreverence, our Queen might have taken for her own the declaration of our Lord Himself on this occasion, 'I am among you as one that serveth.' She served her people by the diligent discharge of the duties that were laid upon her. During a strenuous reign of sixty-three years, she left no arrears, nothing neglected, nothing postponed, nothing undone. In sorrow as in joy, when life was young, and the love of husband and family joys were new, as when husband and children were taken away, and she was an old woman, lonelier because of her throne, she laboured as 'ever in the great Taskmaster's eye.' That was serving her nation by the will of God. She served her people by that swift, sincere sympathy which claimed a share alike in great national and in small private sorrows. Was there some shipwreck or some storm, that widowed humble fisherfolk in their villages? The Queen's sympathy was the first to reach them. Were the blinds drawn down in some colliery village because of an explosion? The Queen's message was there to bring a gleam of light into darkened homes. Did some great name in literature or science pass away? Who but she was first to recognise the loss, to speak gracious words of appreciation? Did some poor shepherd die, in the strath where she made her Highland home? The widowed Queen was beside the widowed peasant, to share and to solace. Knowing sorrow herself only too well, she had learned to run to the help of the wretched. Dowered doubly with a woman's gift of sympathy, she had not let the altitude of a throne freeze its flow.

She served her people yet more by letting them feel that she took them into her confidence, spreading

before them in the days of her widowhood the cherished records that her happy pen had written in the vanished days of her wifehood, opening her heart to us in mute petition that we might give our hearts to her. She served her people by the simplicity of her tastes and habits in these days of senseless luxury, and fierce, sensuous excitement of living. She served her people by the purity of her life, and so far as she could by putting a barrier around her Court, across which nothing that was foul could pass. 'He that worketh iniquity shall not tarry in my house,' said an ancient king on taking his throne. And our Queen, to the utmost of her power, said the same; and frowned down—stern for once in a righteous cause—impurity in high places. Una had her lion, and this protest of a woman's delicacy against the vices of modern society is not the least of the services for which we have to thank her.

Let me remind you that all this patient self-surrender had its root in Christian faith. She had taken her Lord for her example because her faith had knit her to Him as her Saviour.

Therefore she, as no other English sovereign, conquered the heart of the nation, and was best loved by the best men and women. Never was there a more striking confirmation of the truth that whoever in any region reigns to serve will serve to reign.

And now, before I close, let me remind you that the principles which I have been trying to express grip us in our several spheres, quite as tightly as they do those who may be more largely endowed, or more loftily placed than ourselves. There is no ideal for a Christian monarch which is not the ideal also for a Christian peasant. That which is the duty of the highest is no less the duty of the lowest. For us all it remains true



that what we have we are bound to use, not for ourselves, but as recognising both our stewardship to God and the solidarity of humanity; to use for Him, that is to say, for men. This is the secret of all high, noble, blessed life for evermore.

And, brethren, whilst I for one heartily rejoice in the growing consciousness of responsibility which is being diffused through all ranks of society to-day, and, bless God, for one impulse to that recognition which, as I believe, came from the life now peacefully closed, I shall be no doubt charged by some of you with old-fashioned narrowness if I reiterate my own earnest conviction that we can rely on nothing to bring about a thoroughgoing, a widely-diffused, and a permanent altruism—to use the modern word—except the force that comes from the motive which Jesus Christ Himself adduced, in this very conversation, when He said, ‘I am among you as he that serveth.’ There is our example, ay! and more than our example, lodged in Him, and available for us, by our simple faith in Him. In love that seeks to copy, lies the only power that will cast out self, that ‘anarch old,’ from his usurped seat in our hearts, and will throne Jesus Christ there. It needs a mighty lever to heave a planet from its orbit, and to set it circling round another sun; and there is nothing that will deliver any man, in any rank of life, from the dominion of self, except submission to the dominion of Him who, because He died to serve, deserves, and has won, the supreme right of authority and dominion over human life.

To use anything for self is to miss its highest goodness, and to mar ourselves. To use anything for Christ and our brethren is to find its sweetest sweetness, and to bless ourselves to the very uttermost.

Self-absorption is self-destruction; self-surrender is self-acquisition.

If we can truly say, 'I am among you as he that serveth,' if all our possessions suggest to us obligations and all our powers impose on us duties: then be we prince or peasant, rich or poor, entrusted with many talents or with but one, we shall make the best of life here, and pass to higher authority, which is nobler service hereafter. Be the servant of all, and all are yours; serve Christ, and possess yourselves—these are the lessons from that royal life of service. May we learn them! May the King walk in his mother's steps and hearken to 'the oracle which his mother taught him'!

### THE LONELY CHRIST

'Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations.'—LUKE xxii. 28.

WE wonder at the disciples when we read of the unseemly strife for precedence which jars on the tender solemnities of the Last Supper. We think them strangely unsympathetic and selfish; and so they were. But do not let us be too hard on them, nor forget that there was a very natural reason for the close connection which is found in the gospels between our Lord's announcements of His sufferings and this eager dispute as to who should be the greatest in the kingdom. They dimly understood what He meant, but they did understand this much, that His 'sufferings' were immediately to precede His 'glory'—and so it is not, after all, to be so much wondered at if the apparent approach of these made the settlement of their places in the impending

kingdom seem to them a very pressing question. We should probably have thought so too, if we had been among them.

Perhaps, too, the immediate occasion of this strife who should be accounted the greatest, which drew from Christ the words of our text, may have been the unwillingness of each to injure his possible claim to pre-eminence by doing the servant's tasks at the modest meal. May we not suppose that the basin and the towel were refused by one after another, with muttered words growing louder and angrier: 'It is not my place,' says Peter; 'you, Andrew, take it'—and so from hand to hand it goes, till the Master ends the strife and takes it Himself to wash their feet. Then, when He had sat down again, He may have spoken the words of which our text is part—in which He tells the wrangling disciples what is the true law of honour in His kingdom, namely, *service*, and points to Himself as the great example. With what emphasis the pathetic incident of the foot-washing invests the clause before our text: 'I am among you as he that serveth.' On that disclosure of the true law of pre-eminence in His kingdom there follows in this and following verses the assurance, that, unseemly as their strife, there was reward for them, and places of dignity there, because in all their selfishness and infirmity, they had still clung to their Master.

This being the original purpose of these words, I venture to use them for another. They give us, if I mistake not, a wonderful glimpse into the heart of Christ, and a most pathetic revelation of His thoughts and experiences, all the more precious because it is quite incidental and, we may say, unconscious.

I. See then, here, the tempted Christ.

In one sense, our Lord is His own perpetual theme. He is ever speaking of Himself, inasmuch as He is ever presenting what He is to us, and what He claims of us. In another sense, He scarcely ever speaks of Himself, inasmuch as deep silence, for the most part, lies over His own inward experiences. How precious, therefore, and how profoundly significant is that word here—'in My temptations'! So He summed up all His life. To feel the full force of the expression, it should be remembered that the temptation in the wilderness was past before His first disciple attached himself to Him, and that the conflict in Gethsemane had not yet come when these words were spoken. The period to which they refer, therefore, lies altogether within these limits, including neither. After the former, 'Satan,' we read, 'departed from Him for a season.' Before the latter, we read, 'the prince of this world cometh.' The space between, of which people are so apt to think as free from temptation, is the time of which our Lord is speaking now. The time when His followers 'compained with Him' is to His consciousness the time of His 'temptations.'

That is not the point of view from which the Gospel narratives present it, for the plain reason that they are not autobiographies, and that Jesus said little about the continuous assaults to which He was exposed. It is not the point of view from which we often think of it. We are too apt to conceive of Christ's temptations as all gathered together—curdled and clotted, as it were, at the two ends of His life, leaving the space between free. But we cannot understand the meaning of that life, nor feel aright the love and help that breathe from it, unless we think of it as a field of continual and diversified temptations.



How remarkable is the choice of the expression! To Christ, His life, looking back on it, does not so much present itself in the aspect of sorrow, difficulty or pain, as in that of temptation. He looked upon all outward things mainly with regard to their power to help or to hinder His life's work. So for us, sorrow or joy should matter comparatively little. The evil in the evil should be felt to be sin, and the true cross and burden of life should be to us, as to our Master, the appeals it makes to us to abandon our tasks, and fling away our filial dependence and submission.

This is not the place to plunge into the thorny questions which surround the thought of the tempted Christ. However these may be solved, the great fact remains, that His temptations were most real and unceasing. It was no sham fight which He fought. The story of the wilderness is the story of a most real conflict; and that conflict is waged all through His life. True, the traces of it are few. The battle was fought on both sides in grim silence, as sometimes men wage a mortal struggle without a sound. But if there were no other witness of the sore conflict, the Victor's shout at the close would be enough. His last words, 'I have overcome the world,' sound the note of triumph, and tell how sharp had been the strife. So long and hard had it been that He cannot forget it even in heaven, and from the throne holds forth to all the churches the hope of overcoming, 'even as I also overcame.' As on some battlefield whence all traces of the agony and fury have passed away, and harvests wave, and larks sing where blood ran and men groaned their lives out, some grey stone raised by the victors remains, and only the trophy tells of the forgotten fight, so that monumental word, 'I have overcome'

stands to all ages as the record of the silent, life-long conflict.

It is not for us to know how the sinless Christ was tempted. There are depths beyond our reach. This we can understand, that a sinless manhood is not above the reach of temptation; and this besides, that, to such a nature, the temptations must be suggested from without, not presented from within. The desire for food is simply a physical craving, but another personality than His own uses it to incite the Son to abandon dependence for His physical life on God. The trust in God's protection is holy and good, and it may be truest wisdom and piety to incur danger in dependence on it, when God's service calls, but a mocking voice without suggests, under the cloak of it, a needless rushing into peril at no call of conscience, and for no end of mercy, which is not religion but self-will. The desire to have the world for His own lay in Christ's deepest heart, but the enemy of Christ and man, who thought the world his already, used it as giving occasion to suggest a smoother and shorter road to win all men unto Him than the 'Via Dolorosa' of the Cross. So the sinless Christ was tempted at the beginning, and so the sinless Christ was tempted, in various forms of these first temptations, throughout His life. The path which He had to tread was ever before Him, the shadow of the Cross was flung along His road from the first. The pain and sorrow, the shame and spitting, the contradiction of sinners against Himself, the easier path which needed but a wish to become His, the shrinking of flesh—all these made their appeal to Him, and every step of the path which He trod for us was trodden by the power of a fresh consecration of Himself to His task and a fresh victory over temptation.

Let us not seek to analyse. Let us be content to worship, as we look. Let us think of the tempted Christ, that our conceptions of His sinlessness may be increased. His was no untried and cloistered virtue, pure because never brought into contact with seducing evil, but a militant and victorious goodness, that was able to withstand in the evil day. Let us think of the tempted Christ that our thankful thoughts of what He bore for us may be warmer and more adequate, as we stand afar off and look on at the mystery of His battle with our enemies and His. Let us think of the tempted Christ to make the lighter burden of our cross, and our less terrible conflict easier to bear and to wage. So will He 'continue with *us* in *our* temptations,' and patience and victory flow to us from Him.

## II. See here the lonely Christ.

There is no aspect of our Lord's life more pathetic than that of His profound loneliness. I suppose the most utterly solitary man that ever lived was Jesus Christ. If we think of the facts of His life, we see how His nearest kindred stood aloof from Him, how 'there were none to praise, and very few to love'; and how, even in the small company of His friends, there was absolutely none who either understood Him or sympathised with Him. We hear a great deal about the solitude in which men of genius live, and how all great souls are necessarily lonely. That is true, and that solitude of great men is one of the compensations which run through all life, and make the lot of the many little, more enviable than that of the few great. 'The little hills rejoice together on every side,' but far above their smiling companionships, the Alpine peak lifts itself into the cold air, and though it be 'visited all night by troops of stars,' it is

lonely amid the silence and the snow. Talk of the solitude of pure character amid evil, like Lot in Sodom, or of the loneliness of uncomprehended aims and unshared thoughts—who ever experienced that as keenly as Christ did? That perfect purity must needs have been hurt by the sin of men as none else have ever been. That loving heart yearning for the solace of an answering heart must needs have felt a sharper pang of unrequited love than ever pained another. That spirit to which the things that are seen were shadows, and the Father and the Father's house the ever-present, only realities must have felt itself parted from the men whose portion was in this life, by a gulf broader than ever opened between any other two souls that shared together human life.

The more pure and lofty a nature, the more keen its sensitiveness, the more exquisite its delights, and the sharper its pains. The more loving and unselfish a heart, the more its longing for companionship: and the more its aching in loneliness.

Very significant and pathetic are many points in the Gospel story bearing on this matter. The very choice of the Twelve had for its first purpose, 'that they should be with Him,' as one of the Evangelists tells us. We know how constantly He took the three who were nearest to Him along with Him, and that surely not merely that they might be 'eye-witnesses of His majesty' on the holy mount, or of His agony in Gethsemane, but as having a real gladness and strength even in their companionship amid the mystery of glory as amid the power of darkness. We read of His being alone but twice in all the gospels, and both times for prayer. And surely the



dullest ear can hear a note of pain in that prophetic word: 'The hour cometh that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone'; while every heart must feel the pitiful pathos of the plea, 'Tarry ye here, and watch with Me.' Even in that supreme hour, He longs for human companionship, however uncomprehending, and stretches out His hands in the great darkness, to feel the touch of a hand of flesh and blood—and, alas, for poor feeble love!—He gropes for it in vain. Surely that horror of utter solitude is one of the elements of His passion grave and sorrowful enough to be named by the side of the other bitterness poured into that cup, even as it was pain enough to form a substantive feature of the great prophetic picture: 'I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.'

So here, a deep pain in His loneliness is implied in these words of our text which put the disciples' participation in the glories of His throne as the issue of their loyal continuance with Him in the conflict of earth. These, and these only, had been by His side, and so much does He care for their companionship, that therefore they shall share His dominion.

That lonely Christ sympathises with all solitary hearts. If ever we feel ourselves misunderstood and thrown back upon ourselves; if ever our hearts' burden of love is rejected; if our outward lives be lonely and earth yields nothing to stay our longing for companionship; if our hearts have been filled with dear ones and are now empty or filled only with tears, let us think of Him and say, 'Yet I am not alone.' He lived alone, alone He died, that no heart might ever be solitary any more. 'Could ye not watch with Me?' was His gentle

rebuke in Gethsemane. 'Lo, I am with *you* always,' is His mighty promise from the throne. In every step of life we may have Him for a companion, a friend closer than all others, nearer us than our very selves, if we may so say—and in the valley of the shadow of death we need fear no evil, for He will be with us.

III. See here the grateful Christ.

I almost hesitate to use the word, but there seems a distinct ring of thanks in the expression, and in the connection. And we need not wonder at that, if we rightly understand it. There is nothing in it inconsistent with our Lord's character and relations to His disciples. Do you remember another instance in which one seems to hear the same tone, namely, in the marked warmth with which He acknowledges the beautiful service of Mary in breaking the fragrant casket of nard upon His head?

All true love is glad when it is met, glad to give, and glad to receive. Was it not a joy to Jesus to be waited on by the ministering women? Would He not thank them because they served Him for love? I trow, yes. And if any one stumbles at the word 'grateful' as applied to Him, we do not care about the word so long as it is seen that His heart was gladdened by loving friends, and that He recognised in their society a ministry of love.

Notice, too, the loving estimate of what these disciples had done. Their companionship had been imperfect enough at the best. They had given Him but blind affection, dashed with much selfishness. In an hour or two they would all have forsaken Him and fled. He knew all that was lacking in them, and the cowardly abandonment which was so near. But He has not a word to say of all this. He does not count jealously

the flaws in our work, or reject it because it is incomplete. So here is the great truth clearly set forth, that where there is a loving heart, there is acceptable service. It is possible that our poor, imperfect deeds shall be an odour of a sweet smell, acceptable, well-pleasing to Him. Which of us that is a father is not glad at his children's gifts, even though they be purchased with his own money, and be of little use? They mean love, so they are precious. And Christ, in like manner, gladly accepts what we bring, even though it be love chilled by selfishness, and faith broken by doubt,—submission crossed by self-will. The living heart of the disciples' acceptable service was their love, far less intelligent and entire than ours may be. They were joined to their Lord, though with but partial sympathy and knowledge, in His temptations. It is possible for us to be joined to Jesus Christ more closely and more truly than they were during His earthly life. Union with Him here is union with Him hereafter. If we abide in Him amid the shows and shadows of earth, He will continue with us in our temptations, and so the fellowships begun on earth will be perfected in heaven, 'if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.'

### A GREAT FALL AND A GREAT RECOVERY

'But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.'—LUKE xxii. 32.

OUR Lord has just been speaking words of large and cordial praise of the steadfastness with which His friends had continued with Him in His temptations, and it is the very contrast between that continuance

and the prevision of the cowardly desertion of the Apostle which occasioned the abrupt transition to this solemn appeal to him, which indicates how the forecast pained Christ's heart. He does not let the foresight of Peter's desertion chill His praise of Peter's past faithfulness as one of the Twelve. He does not let the remembrance of Peter's faithfulness modify His rebuke for Peter's intended and future desertion. He speaks to him, with significant and emphatic reiteration of the old name of Simon that suggests weakness, unsanctified and unhelped: 'Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.' *There is a glimpse given, a corner of the curtain being lifted, into a dim region in which faith should not refuse to discern so much light as Christ has given, because superstition has so often fancied that it saw what it only dreamed. But passing from that, the words before us seem to me to suggest a threefold thought of the Intercessor for tempted souls; of the consequent re-illumination of eclipsed faith; and of the larger service for which the discipline of fall and recovery fits him who falls. Let me say a word or two about each of these thoughts.*

I. We have the Intercessor for tempted souls.

Notice that majestic 'but' with which my text begins, 'Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, *but* I have prayed for thee.' He presents Himself, then, as the Antagonist, the confident and victorious Antagonist, of whatsoever mysterious, malignant might may lie beyond the confines of sense, and He says, 'My prayer puts the hook in leviathan's nose, and the malevolent desire to sift, in order that not the chaff but the wheat may disappear, comes all to nothing by the side of My prayer.'



Note the discrimination of the intercession. He 'hath desired to have *you*'—that is plural; 'I have prayed for *thee*'—that is singular. The man that was in the greatest danger was the man nearest to Christ's heart, and chiefly the object of Christ's intercession. So it is always—the tenderest of His words, the sweetest of His consolations, the strongest of His succours, the most pleading and urgent of His petitions, the mightiest gifts of His grace, are given to the weakest, the neediest, the men and women in most sorrow and stress and peril, and they who want Him most always have Him nearest. The thicker the darkness, the brighter His light; the drearier our lives, the richer His presence; the more solitary we are, the larger the gifts of His companionship. Our need is the measure of His prayer. 'Satan hath desired to have *you*, but thou, Peter, dost stand in the very focus of the danger, and so on *thee* are focussed, too, the rays of My love and care.' Be sure, dear friends, that it is always so for us, and that when you want Christ most, Christ is most to you.

Then, I need not touch at any length upon that great subject on which none of us can speak adequately or with full comprehension—viz. our Lord as the Intercessor for us in all our weakness and need. We believe in His continual manhood, we believe that He prayed upon earth, we believe that He prays in heaven. His prayer is no mere utterance of words: it is the presentation of a fact, the bringing ever before the Infinite Divine Mind, as it were, of His great work of sacrifice, as the condition which determines, and the channel through which flows, the gift of sustaining grace from God Himself. And so we may be sure that whensoever there come to any of us trials, difficulties,

conflicts, temptations, they are known to our Brother in the skies, and the stormier the gales that threaten us, the closer He wraps His protection round us. We have an Advocate and an Intercessor before the Throne; His prayer is always heard. Oh, brethren! how different our endurance would be, if we vividly believed that Christ was praying for us! How it would take the sting out of sorrow, and blunt the edge of temptation, if we realised that! O for a faith that shall rend the heavens, and rise above the things seen and temporal, and behold the eternal order of the universe, the central Throne, and at the right hand of God, the Intercessor for all who love and trust Him!

II. Notice again the consequent re-illumination of eclipsed faith.

‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.’ Did it fail? If we look only at Peter’s denial, we must answer, Yes. If we look at the whole of the future life of the Apostle, we answer, No. Eclipse is not extinction; the momentary untruthfulness to one’s deepest convictions is not the annihilation of these convictions. Christ’s prayer is never vain, and Christ’s prayer was answered just because Peter, though he fell, did not lie in the mud, but staggered to his feet again, and with sore weeping and many an agony of shame, struggled onward, with unconquerable hope, in the path from which, for a moment, he strayed. Better one great outburst like his, the nature of which there is no possibility of mistaking, than the going on, as so many professing Christians do, from year to year, walking in a vain show of godliness, and fancying themselves to be disciples, when all the while they are recreants and apostates. There is more chance of the recovery of a good man that has fallen into some sin,

'gross as a mountain, open, palpable,' than there is of the recovery of those who let their religion trickle out of them in drops, and never know that their veins are empty until the heart ceases to beat at all.

Here, then, we have two large lessons from which we may take strength, taught us by this darkening and re-illumination of an eclipsed faith. One is that the sincerest love, the truest desire to follow Jesus, the firmest faith, may be overborne, and the whole set of a life contradicted for a time. Thank God, there is a vast difference between conduct which is inconsistent with being a Christian and conduct which is incompatible with being a Christian. It is dangerous, perhaps, to apply the difference too liberally in judging ourselves; it is imperative to apply it always in judging our fellows. But if it be true that Peter meant, down to the very bottom of his heart, all that he said when he said, 'I will lay down my life for Thee,' while yet within a few hours afterwards the sad prophecy of our Lord was fulfilled—'Thou shalt deny Me thrice!'—let us take the lesson, not, indeed, to abate our horror of the sin, but on the one hand to cut the comb of our own self-confidence, and on the other hand to judge with all charity and tenderness the faults of our brethren. 'Be not high-minded, but fear,' and when we look into the black gulf into which Peter fell bodily, let us cry, 'Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe.'

The other lesson is that the deepest fall may be recovered. Our Lord in the words of our text does not definitely prophesy what He subsequently declares in plain terms, the fall of Peter, but He implies it when He says, 'when thou art converted'—or, as the Revised Version reads it much more accurately, 'when once thou hast turned again strengthen thy brethren.'

Then, the Apostle's face had been turned the wrong way for a time, and he needed to turn right-about-face in order to renew the old direction of his life. He came back for two reasons—one because Christ prayed for him, and the other because he 'turned himself.' For the only way back is through the valley of weeping and the dark lane of penitence; and whosoever has denied with Peter, or at least grovelled with Peter, or perhaps grovelled much more than Peter, 'denying the Lord that bought him' by living as if He was not his Lord, will never come back to the place that Peter again won for himself, but by the road by which Peter went. 'The Lord turned and looked upon him,' and Christ's face, with love and sorrow and reproach in it, taught him his sin, and bowed his heart, 'and he went out and wept bitterly.'

Peter and Judas both 'went out'; the one 'went out and hanged himself,' because his conviction of his sin was unaccompanied with a faith in his Master's love, and his repentance was only remorse; and the other 'went out and wept bitterly,' and so came back with a clean heart. And on the Resurrection morning he was ready for the message: 'Go, tell His disciples, *and Peter*, He goeth before you into Galilee.' And the Lord appeared to him, in that conversation, the existence of which was known, though the particulars were unknown, to the rest; and when 'He appeared unto Cephas,' spoke his full forgiveness. There is the road back for all wanderers.

III. The last thought is, the larger service for which such an experience will fit him who falls.

'Strengthen thy brethren when once thou hast turned again.' I need not remind you how nobly the Apostle fulfilled this commandment. Satan desired to



have him, that he might sift him as wheat; but Satan's sifting was in order that he might get rid of the wheat and harvest the chaff. His malice worked indirectly the effect opposite to his purpose, and achieved the same result as Christ's winnowing seeks to accomplish—namely, it got rid of the chaff and kept the wheat. Peter's vanity was sifted out of him, his self-confidence was sifted out of him, his rash presumption was sifted out of him, his impulsive readiness to blurt out the first thought that came into his head was sifted out of him, and so his unreliableness and changeableness were largely sifted out of him, and he became what Christ said he had in him the makings of being—'Cephas, a rock,' or, as the Apostle Paul, who was never unwilling to praise the others, said, a man 'who looked like a pillar.' He 'strengthened his brethren,' and to many generations the story of the Apostle who denied the Lord he loved has ministered comfort. To how many tempted souls, and souls that have yielded to temptation, and souls that, having yielded, are beginning to grope their way back again out of its vulgar delights and surfeiting sweetnesss, and find that there is a desert to be traversed before they can again reach the place where they stood before, has that story ministered hope, as it will minister to the very end! The bone that is broken is stronger, they tell us, at the point of junction, when it heals and grows again, than it ever was before. And it may well be that a faith that has made experience of falling and restoration has learned a depth of self-distrust, a firmness of confidence in Christ, a warmth of grateful love which it would never otherwise have experienced.

The Apostle about whom we have been speaking seems to have carried in his mind and memory an

abiding impression from that bitter experience, and in his letter when he was an old man, and all that past was far away, he writes many words which sound like echoes and reminiscences of it. In the last chapter of his epistle, in which he speaks of himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ, there are numbers of verses which seem to point to what had happened in the Upper Room. 'Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.' Jesus Christ had then said, 'He that is the greater among you, let him be as the younger.' Peter says, 'Be clothed with humility'; he remembers Christ wrapping a towel around Him, girding Himself, and taking the basin. He says, 'God resisteth the proud,' and he remembers how proud he had been, with his boast: 'Though all should . . . yet will not I,' and how low he fell because he was 'fool' enough to 'trust in his own heart.' 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist, steadfast in the faith.' 'The God of all grace stablish, strengthen, settle you.' He thus strengthened his brethren when he reminded them of the temptation to which he himself had so shamefully succumbed, and when he referred them for all their strength to the source of it all, even God in Christ.

### GETHSEMANE

'And He came out, and went, as He was wont, to the mount of Olives; and His disciples also followed Him. 40. And when He was at the place, He said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. 41. And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, 42. Saying, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done. 43. And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him. 44. And, being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. 45. And when He rose up

from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow, 46. And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. 47. And while He yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him. 48. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? 49. When they which were about Him saw what would follow, they said unto Him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? 50. And one of them smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. 51. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear, and healed him. 52. Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to Him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? 53. When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against Me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.'—LUKE xxii. 39-53.

'PUT off thy shoes from off thy feet.' Cold analysis is out of place here, where the deepest depth of a Saviour's sorrows is partly disclosed, and we see Him bowing His head to the waves and billows that went over Him, for our sakes. Luke's account is much condensed, but contains some points peculiar to itself. It falls into two parts—the solemn scene of the agony, and the circumstances of the arrest.

I. We look with reverent awe and thankfulness at that soul-subduing picture of the agonising and submissive Christ which Luke briefly draws. Think of the contrast between the joyous revelry of the festival-keeping city and the sadness of the little company which crossed the Kedron and passed beneath the shadow of the olive-trees into the moonlit garden. Jesus needed companions there; but He needed solitude still more. So He is 'parted from them'; but Luke alone tells us how short the distance was—'as it were a stone's throw,' and near enough for the disciples to see and hear something before they slept.

That clinging to and separation from His humble friends gives a wonderful glimpse into Christ's desolation then. And how beautiful is His care for them, even at that supreme hour, which leads to the injunction twice spoken, at the beginning and end of His own

prayers, that they should pray, not for Him, but for themselves. He never asks for men's prayers, but He does for their love. He thinks of His sufferings as temptation for the disciples, and for the moment forgets His own burden, in pointing them the way to bear theirs. Did self-oblivious love ever shine more gloriously in the darkness of sorrow?

Luke omits the threefold withdrawal and return, but notes three things—the prayer, the angel appearance, and the physical effects of the agony. The essentials are all preserved in his account. The prayer is truly 'the Lord's prayer,' and the perfect pattern for ours. Mark the grasp of God's fatherhood, which is at once appeal and submission. So should all prayer begin, with the thought, at all events, whether with the word 'Father' or no. Mark the desire that 'this cup' should pass. The expression shows how vividly the impending sufferings were pictured before Christ's eye. The keenest pains of anticipation, which make so large a part of so many sorrows, were felt by Him. He shrank from His sufferings. Did He therefore falter in His desire and resolve to endure the Cross? A thousand times, no! His will never wavered, but maintained itself supreme over the natural recoil of His human nature from pain and death. If He had not felt the Cross to be a dread, it had been no sacrifice. If He had allowed the dread to penetrate to His will, He had been no Saviour. But now He goes before us in the path which all have, in their degree, to travel, and accepts pain that He may do His work.

That acceptance of the divine will is no mere 'If it must be so, let it be so,' much as that would have been. But He receives in His prayer the true answer—for His will completely coincides with the Father's, and



'mine' is 'thine.' Such conformity of our wills with God's is the highest blessing of prayer and the true deliverance. The cup accepted is sweet; and though flesh may shrink, the inner self consents, and in consenting to the pain, conquers it.

Luke alone tells of the ministering angel; and, according to some authorities, the forty-third and forty-fourth verses are spurious. But, accepting them as genuine, what does the angelic appearance teach us? It suggests pathetically the utter physical prostration of Jesus. Sensuous religion has dwelt on that offensively, but let us not rush to the opposite extreme, and ignore it. It teaches us that the manhood of Jesus needed the communication of divine help as truly as we do. The difficulty of harmonising that truth with His divine nature was probably the reason for the omission of this verse in some manuscripts. It teaches the true answer to His prayer, as so often to ours; namely, the strength to bear the load, not the removal of it. It is remarkable that the renewal of the solemn 'agony' and the intenser earnestness of prayer follow the strengthening by the angel.

Increased strength increased the conflict of feeling, and the renewed and intensified conflict increased the earnestness of the prayer. The calmness won was again disturbed, and a new recourse to the source of it was needed. We stand reverently afar off, and ask, not too curiously, what it is that falls so heavily to the ground, and shines red and wet in the moonlight. But the question irresistibly rises, Why all this agony of apprehension? If Jesus Christ was but facing death as it presents itself to all men, His shrinking is far beneath the temper in which many a man has

fronted the scaffold and the fire. We can scarcely save His character for admiration, unless we see in the agony of Gethsemane something much more than the shrinking from a violent death, and understand how there the Lord made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all. If the burden that crushed Him thus was but the common load laid on all men's shoulders, He shows unmanly terror. If it were the black mass of the world's sins, we can understand the agony, and rejoice to think that our sins were there.

II. The arrest. Three points are made prominent—the betrayer's token, the disciples' resistance, the reproof of the foes, and in each the centre of interest is our Lord's words. The sudden bursting in of the multitude is graphically represented. The tumult broke the stillness of the garden, but it brought deeper peace to Christ's heart; for while the anticipation agitated, the reality was met with calmness. Blessed they who can unmoved front evil, the foresight of which shook their souls! Only they who pray as Jesus did beneath the olives, can go out from their shadow, as He did, to meet the foe.

The first of the three incidents of the arrest brings into strong prominence Christ's meek patience, dignity, calmness, and effort, even at that supreme moment, to rouse dormant conscience, and save the traitor from himself. Judas probably had no intention by his kiss of anything but showing the mob their prisoner; but he must have been far gone in insensibility before he could fix on such a sign. It was the token of friendship and discipleship, and no doubt was customary among the disciples, though we never hear of any lips touching Jesus but the penitent woman's, which were laid on His feet, and the traitor's.

The worst hypocrisy is that which is unconscious of its own baseness.

Every word of Christ's answer to the shameful kiss is a sharp spear, struck with a calm and not resentful hand right into the hardened conscience. There is wistful tenderness and a remembrance of former confidences in calling Him by name. The order of words in the original emphasises the kiss, as if Jesus had said, 'Is that the sign you have chosen? Could nothing else serve you? Are you so dead to all feeling that you can kiss and betray?' The Son of man flashes on Judas, for the last time, the majesty and sacredness against which he was lifting his hand. 'Betrayest thou?' which comes last in the Greek, seeks to startle by putting into plain words the guilt, and so to rend the veil of sophistications in which the traitor was hiding his deed from himself. Thus to the end Christ seeks to keep him from ruin, and with meek patience resents not indignity, but with majestic calmness sets before the miserable man the hideousness of his act. The patient Christ is the same now as then, and meets all our treason with pleading, which would fain teach us how black it is, not because He is angry, but because He would win us to turn from it. Alas that so often His remonstrances fall on hearts as wedded to their sin as was Judas's!

The rash resistance of the disciple is recorded chiefly for the sake of Christ's words and acts. The anonymous swordsman was Peter, and the anonymous victim was Malchus, as John tells us. No doubt he had brought one of the two swords from the upper room, and, in a sudden burst of anger and rashness, struck at the man nearest him, not considering the fatal consequences for them all that might follow. Peter could manage nets better than swords, and missed the head,

in his flurry and in the darkness, only managing to shear off a poor slave's ear. When the Church takes sword in hand, it usually shows that it does not know how to wield it, and as often as not has struck the wrong man. Christ tells Peter and us, in His word here, what His servants' true weapons are, and rebukes all armed resistance of evil. 'Suffer ye thus far' is a command to oppose violence only by meek endurance, which wins in the long run, as surely as the patient sunshine melts the thick ice, which is ice still, when pounded with a hammer.

If 'thus far' as to His own seizure and crucifying was to be 'suffered,' where can the breaking-point of patience and non-resistance be fixed? Surely every other instance of violence and wrong lies far on this side of that one. The prisoner heals the wound. Wonderful testimony that not inability to deliver Himself, but willingness to be taken, gave Him into the hands of His captors! Blessed proof that He lavishes benefits on His foes, and that His delight is to heal all wounds and stanch every bleeding heart!

The last incident here is Christ's piercing rebuke, addressed, not to the poor, ignorant tools, but to the prime movers of the conspiracy, who had come to gloat over its success. He asserts His own innocence, and hints at the preposterous inadequacy of 'swords and staves' to take Him. He is no 'robber,' and their weapons are powerless, unless He wills. He recalls His uninterrupted teaching in the Temple, as if to convict them of cowardice, and perchance to bring to remembrance His words there. And then, with that same sublime and strange majesty of calm submission which marks all His last hours, He unveils to these furious persecutors the true character of their



deed. The sufferings of Jesus were the meeting-point of three worlds—earth, hell, and heaven. ‘This is your hour.’ But it was also Satan’s hour, and it was Christ’s ‘hour,’ and God’s. Man’s passions, inflamed from beneath, were used to work out God’s purpose; and the Cross is at once the product of human unbelief, of devilish hate, and of divine mercy. His sufferings were ‘the power of darkness.’

Mark in that expression Christ’s consciousness that He is the light, and enmity to Him darkness. Mark, too, His meek submission, as bowing His head to let the black flood flow over Him. Note that Christ brands enmity to Him as the high-water mark of sin, the crucial instance of man’s darkness, the worst thing ever done. Mark the assurance that animated Him, that the eclipse was but for an ‘hour.’ The victory of the darkness was brief, and it led to the eternal triumph of the Light. By dying He is the death of death. This Jonah inflicts deadly wounds on the monster in whose maw He lay for three days. The power of darkness was shivered to atoms in the moment of its proudest triumph, like a wave which is beaten into spray as it rises in a towering crest and flings itself against the rock.

### THE CROSS THE VICTORY AND DEFEAT OF DARKNESS

‘This is your hour, and the power of darkness.’—LUKE xxii. 53.

THE darkness was the right time for so dark a deed. The surface meaning of these pathetic and far-reaching words of our Lord’s in the garden to His captors is to

point the correspondence between the season and the act. As He has just said, 'He had been daily with them in the Temple,' but in the blaze of the noontide they laid no hands upon Him. They found a congenial hour in the midnight. But the words go a great deal deeper than allusive symbolism of that sort. Looking at them as giving us a little glimpse into the thoughts and feelings of Christ, we can scarcely help tracing in them the very clear consciousness that He was the Light, and that all antagonism to Him was the work of darkness in an eminent and especial sense. But whilst this unobscured consciousness, which no mere man could venture so unqualifiedly to assert, is manifest in the words, there is also in them, to my ear, a tone of majestic resignation, as if He said, 'There! do your worst!' and bowed His head, as a man might do, standing breast high in the sea, that the wave might roll over Him. And there is in them, too, a shrinking as of horror from the surging upon Him of the black tide to which He bows His head.

But whilst thus pathetic and significant in their indication of the feelings of our Lord, they have a wider and a deeper meaning still, I think, if we ponder them; inasmuch as they open before us some aspects of His sufferings and eminently of His Cross, which it becomes us all to lay to heart. And it is to these that I desire to turn your attention for a few moments.

I. I see in them, then, first, this great thought, that the Cross of Jesus Christ is the centre and the meeting-point for the energies of three worlds.

'This is your hour.' Now our Lord habitually speaks of His sufferings, and of other points in His life, as being 'My hour,' by which, of course, He means the time appointed to Him by God for the doing of an

appointed work. And that idea is distinctly to be attached to the use of the word here. But, on the other hand, there is emphasis laid on '*your*,' and that hour is thereby designated as a time in which they could do as they would. It was their opportunity, or, as we say in our colloquialism, now was their time when, unhindered, they might carry into effect their purposes.

So there is given us the thought of His passion and death as being the most eminent and awful instance of men being left unchecked to work out whatsoever was in their evil hearts, and to carry into effect their blackest purposes.

But, on the other hand, there goes with the phrase the idea to which I have already referred; and '*this is their hour*,' not merely in the sense that it was their opportunity, but also that it was the hour appointed by God and allotted them for their doing the thing which their unhindered evil passions impelled them to do. And so we are brought face to face with the most eminent instance of that great puzzle that runs through all life—how God works out His lofty designs by means of responsible agents, '*making the wrath of men to praise Him*,' and girding Himself with the remainder.

Nor is that all. For the next words of my text bring in a third set of powers as in operation. '*This is your hour*' lets us see man overarched by the abyss of the heavens, '*and the power of darkness*' lets us see the deep and awful forces that are working beneath and surging upwards into humanity, and opens the subterranean volcanoes. I do not say that there is any reference here to a personal Antagonist of good, in whom these dark tendencies are focussed, but there

is a distinct reference to 'the darkness' as a whole, a kind of organic whole, which operates upon men. Even when they think themselves to be freest, and are carrying out their own wicked designs, they are but the slaves of impulses that come straight from the dark kingdom. If I may turn from the immediate purpose of my sermon for a moment, I pray you to consider that solemn aspect of our life, a film between two firmaments, like the earth with the waters above and the waters beneath. On the one side it is open and pervious to heavenly influences, and moulded by the overarching and sovereign will, and on the other side it is all honeycombed beneath with, and open to, the uprisings of evil, straight from the bottomless pit.

But if we turn to the more immediate purpose of the words, think for a moment of the solemn and wonderful aspect which the Cross of Christ assumes, thus contemplated. Three worlds focus their energies upon it—heaven, earth, hell. Looked at from one side it is all radiant and glorious, as the transcendent exhibition of the divine love and sweetness and sacrifice and righteousness and tenderness. But the sunshine that plays upon it shifts and passes, and looked at from another point of view it is swathed in blackness, as the most awful display of man's unbridled antagonism to the good. And looked at from yet another, it assumes a still more lurid aspect as the last stroke which the kingdom of darkness attempted to strike in defence of its ancient and solitary reign. So earth, heaven, hell, the God that works through man's evil passions, and yet does not acquit them though He utilises them to a lofty issue; man that is evil and thinks himself free; and the kingdom of darkness that uses him as its slave—all



have part in that cross, which is thus the result of such diametrically opposite forces.

The divine government which reached its most beneficent ends through the unbridled antagonism of sinful men, and made even the dark counsels of the kingdom of darkness tributary to the diffusion of the light, works ever in the same fashion. Antagonism and obedience both work out its purposes. Let us learn to bow before that all-encompassing Providence in whose great scheme both are included. Let us not confuse ourselves by the attempt to make plain to our reason the harmony of the two certain facts—man's freedom and God's sovereignty. Enough for us to remember that the sin is none the less though the issue may coincide with the divine purpose, for sin lies in the motive, which is ours, not in the unintended result, which is God's. Enough for us to realise the tremendous solemnity of the lives we live, with all sweet heavenly influences falling on them from above, and all sulphurous suggestions rising into them from the fires beneath, and to see to it that we keep our hearts open to the one, and fast closed against the other.

'This is your hour'—a time in which you feel yourselves free, and yet are instruments in the hands of God, and also are tools in the claws of evil.

II. Still further, my text brings before us the thought that the Cross is the high-water mark of man's sin.

'This is the power of darkness'—the specimen instance of what it would and can do. Strange to think that, amidst all the black catalogue of evil deeds that have been done in this world from the beginning, there is one deed which is the worst, and that it is this one! Not that the doers were 'sinners above all men';

for that is a question of knowledge and of motives, but that the deed in itself was the worst thing that ever man did. Of course I take for granted the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that He came from heaven, that He lived a life of perfect purity and beauty, and that He died on the Cross as the Gospel tells us. And taking these things for granted, is it not true that His rejection, His condemnation, and His death do throw the most awful and solemn light upon what poor humanity left to itself, and yielding to the suggestions and the impulses of the kingdom of darkness, does when it comes in contact with the Light?

It is the great crucial instance of the incapacity of the average man to behold spiritual beauty and lofty elevation of character. People lament over the blindness of embruted souls to natural beauty, to art, to high thinking, and so on; but all these, tragic as they are, are nothing as compared with this stunning fact, that perfect righteousness and perfect tenderness and ideal beauty of character walked about the world for thirty and three years, and that all the wise and religious men who came across Him thought that the best thing they could do was to crucify Him. So it has ever been from the days of Cain and Abel. As the Apostle John asks, 'Wherefore slew he him?' For a very good reason, 'Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.' That is reason enough for killing any prophets and righteous men. It was so in the past, and in modified forms it is so to-day. The plain fact is that humanity has in it a depth of incapacity to behold, and of angry indisposition to admire, lofty and noble lives. The power of the darkness to blind men is set forth once in the superla-

tive degree that we may all beware of it in the lower instances, by that fact, the most tragical in the history of the world, 'the Light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehendeth it not.'

And not only does that Cross mark the high-water mark of man's blindness, and of man's hatred to the lofty and the true and the good, but it marks, too, the awful power that seems, by the very make of the world, to be lodged on the side of evil and against good. The dice seem to be so terribly loaded. Virtue and beauty and truth and tenderness, and all that is noble and lofty and heart-appealing, have no chance against a mere piece of savage brutality. And that fact, which has been repeated over and over again from the beginning, and so largely makes the misery of mankind, reaches its very climax, and most solemn and awful illustration, in the fact that a handful of ruffians and a detachment of Roman soldiers were able to put an end to the life of God manifest in the flesh. If we have nothing more to say about Jesus than that He lived upon earth and did works of goodness and of beauty for a few short years, and then died, and there an end, it seems to me that the story of the Death of Christ is the most despairing page in the whole history of humanity, and that it accentuates and makes still more dreadful the dreadful old puzzle of how it comes that, in a world with a God in it, evil seems to be so riotously preponderant and good seems to be ever trodden under foot. Either the Death of Christ, if He died and did not rise again, is the strongest argument in the history of mankind for rank atheism, or else it is true that He rose, the King of humanity, glorified and exalted by the vain attempts of His foes.

And now notice that this high-water mark, as I have

called it, or climax of human sin, was reached through very common and ordinary transgressions. Judas betrayed Christ because he had always felt uncomfortable with his earthly tendencies beside that pure spirit, and also because he wanted to jingle the thirty pieces of silver in his pocket. The priests did Him to death because He claimed the Messiahship and to be the Son of God, and their formalism rose against Him, and their blindness to all spiritual elevation made them hate Him. Pilate sent Him to the Cross because he was a coward, and thought that the life of a Jewish peasant was a small thing to give in order to secure his position. And the mob howled at His heels, and wagged their heads as they passed by, oblivious of His miracles and His benevolence, simply because of the vulgar hatred of anything that is lofty, and because they were so absorbed in material things that they had no eyes for that radiant beauty. In the whole list of these motives there is not a sin that you and I do not commit, nor is there any one of them which may not be reproduced, and as a matter of fact, is reproduced, by hundreds and thousands in this professedly Christian land.

Oh, brethren! the actual murderers are not the worst criminals, though their deed be the worst, considered in itself. Those Roman soldiers who nailed His hands to the Cross, and went back to their barracks that night, quite comfortable and unconscious that they had been doing anything beyond their routine military duty, were innocent and white-handed compared with the men and women among us, who, with the additional evidence of the Cross, and the empty grave, and the throne in the heavens, and the Christian Church, still stand aloof and say, 'We



see no beauty in Him that we should desire Him.' Take care lest your attitude to Jesus Christ bring the level of your criminality close up to that high-water mark, or carry it even beyond it, for it is possible to 'crucify the Son of God afresh,' and they who do so have the greater guilt.

III. Now, lastly, my text suggests that the temporary triumph of the darkness is the eternal victory of the light.

'*This is your hour*'—not the next. '*This is your hour.*' Sixty minutes tick, and it will be gone. When Christ was beaten He was Conqueror, and as He looked upon His Cross He said, 'I have overcome the world.' The eclipse which hung over the little hill and the land of Palestine, during the long hours of that slowly passing day, ended before He died. And His death was but the passing for a brief moment of the shadow of death across the bright luminary which, when the shadow has passed, shines out and 'with new spangled beams, flames in the forehead of the morning sky.' The darkness triumphed, and in its triumph it was overcome.

He, by dying, is the death of death. This Jonah inflicted a mortal wound on the loathly monster in whose maw He lay for three days. He, by bearing the penalty of sin, takes away the penalty of it for us all. He, in the quenching of the light of His life in the night of death, reveals God more than even He did in His life, and is never more truly the Illuminator of mankind than when He lies in the darkness of the grave and brings immortality to light. He, by His death, delivers men from the kingdom of darkness, and translates them into His own kingdom; giving them new powers for holiness, new hopes, inspiring them to rebellion against the tyrants that have dominion

over them; and thus conquering when He falls. The power of the darkness is broken like a crested wave, toppling over at its highest and dissolving in ineffectual spray.

So we have encouragement for all momentary checks and defeats, if there be such in our experience, when we are doing Christ's work. The history of the Church repeats in all ages, generation after generation, the same law to which the Master submitted: 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.' We conquer when we are overcome; Christ conquered so, and His servants after Him.

And now apply all these principles which I have so imperfectly stated to your own personal lives. Men and the kingdom of darkness over-reached and outwitted themselves when they slew Jesus Christ. And so all antagonism to Him, whether it be theoretical or whether it be practical, and alienation of heart only, is suicidal folly. When it most succeeds it is nearest the breaking point of utter failure, like a man sawing off the branch on which he sits. Every man that sets himself against God in Christ, either to argue Him down and talk Him out of existence, or to 'break His bands asunder and cast away His cords,' has begun a Sisyphean task which will never come to any good. All sin is essentially irrational and opposed to the whole motion of the universe, and must necessarily be annihilated and come to nothing. The coarse title of one of our old English plays carries a great truth in it; 'The Devil is an Ass,' and for the man that obeys the kingdom of darkness the right epitaph is 'Thou fool!' Oh, brothers! do not fling yourselves into that hopeless struggle. Put yourselves on the right side

in this age-long conflict, of which the issue was determined before evil was, and was accomplished when Christ died. For be sure of this, that as certainly as 'The darkness is past, and the true Light now shineth,' so certainly all they that fight against the light—and all men fight against it who shut their eyes to it—are engaged in a conflict of which only one issue is possible, and that is defeat, bitter, complete, absolute. Rather let us all, though we be evil, and though there be a bad self in us that knows itself to be evil and hates the Light—let us all go to it. It may pain the eye, but it is the only cure for the ophthalmia. Let us go to it, spread ourselves out before it, and say, 'Search me, O Christ, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me. Lead me, a blind man, into the light.' And His answer will come: 'I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life.'

### IN THE HIGH PRIEST'S PALACE

'Then took they Him, and led Him, and brought Him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. 55. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. 56. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with Him. 57. And he denied Him, saying, Woman, I know Him not. 58. And, after a little while, another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. 59. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with Him; for he is a Galilean. 60. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. 61. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter: and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. 62. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. 63. And the men that held Jesus mocked Him and smote Him. 64. And when they had blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face, and asked Him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote Thee? 65. And many other things blasphemously spake they against Him. 66. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people, and the chief priests, and the scribes, came together, and led Him into their council, 67. Saying, Art Thou the Christ? tell us. And He said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: 68. And if I also ask you, ye will not answer Me, nor let Me go. 69. Hereafter shall the Son of

man sit on the right hand of the power of God. 70. Then said they all, Art Thou then the Son of God? And He said unto them, Ye say that I am. 71. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of His own mouth.'—LUKE xxii. 54-71.

THE present passage deals with three incidents, each of which may be regarded either as an element in our Lord's sufferings or as a revelation of man's sin. He is denied, mocked, and formally rejected and condemned. A trusted friend proves faithless, the underlings of the rulers brutally ridicule His prophetic claims, and their masters vote Him a blasphemer for asserting His divinity and Messiahship.

I. We have the failure of loyalty and love in Peter's denials. I may observe that Luke puts all Peter's denials before the hearing by the council, from which it is clear that the latter was later than the hearing recorded by Matthew and John. The first denial probably took place in the great hall of the high priest's official residence, at the upper end of which the prisoner was being examined, while the hangers-on huddled round the fire, idly waiting the event.

The morning air bit sharply, and Peter, exhausted, sleepy, sad, and shivering, was glad to creep near the blaze. Its glinting on his face betrayed him to a woman's sharp eye, and her gossiping tongue could not help blurting out her discovery. Curiosity, not malice, moved her; and there is no reason to suppose that any harm would have come to Peter, if he had said, as he should have done, 'Yes, I am His disciple.' The day for persecuting the servants was not yet come, but for the present it was Jesus only who was aimed at.

No doubt, cowardice had a share in the denials, but there was more than that in them. Peter was worn out with fatigue, excitement, and sorrow. His susceptible nature would be strongly affected by the trying



scenes of the last day, and all the springs of life would be low. He was always easily influenced by surroundings, and just as, at a later date, he was 'carried away' by the presence at Antioch of the Judaisers, and turned his back on the liberal principles which he had professed, so now he could not resist the current of opinion, and dreaded being unlike even the pack of menials among whom he sat. He was ashamed of his Master and hid his colours, not so much for fear of bodily harm as of ridicule. Was there not a deeper depth still in his denials, even the beginnings of doubt whether, after all, Jesus was what he had thought Him? Christ prayed that Peter's 'faith' should not 'fail' or be totally eclipsed, and that may indicate that the assault was made on his 'faith' and that it wavered, though it recovered steadfastness.

If he had been as sure of Christ's work and nature as when he made his great confession, he could not have denied Him. But the sight of Jesus bound, unresisting, and evidently at the mercy of the rulers, might well make a firmer faith stagger. We have not to steel ourselves to bear bodily harm if we confess Christ; but many of us have to run counter to a strong current flowing around us, and to be alone in the midst of unsympathising companions ready to laugh and gibe, and some of us are tempted to waver in our convictions of Christ's divinity and redeeming power, because He still seems to stand at the bar of the wise men and leaders of opinion, and to be treated by them as a pretender. It is a wretched thing to be persecuted out of one's Christianity in the old-fashioned fire and sword style; but it is worse to be laughed out of it or to lose it, because we breathe an atmosphere of unbelief. Let the doctors at the top of the hall and the lackeys round

the fire who take their opinions from them say what they like, but let them not make us ashamed of Jesus.

Peter slipped away to the gateway, and there, apparently, was again attacked, first by the porters and then by others, which occasioned the second denial, while the third took place in the same place, about an hour afterwards. One sin makes many. The devil's hounds hunt in packs. Consistency requires the denier to stick to his lie. Once the tiniest wing tip is in the spider's web, before long the whole body will be wrapped round by its filthy, sticky threads.

If Peter had been less confident, he would have been more safe. If he had said less about going to prison and death, he would have had more reserve fidelity for the time of trial. What business had he thrusting himself into the palace? Over-reliance on self leads us to put ourselves in the way of temptations which it were wiser to avoid. Had he forgotten Christ's warnings? Apparently so. Christ predicts the fall that it may not happen, and if we listen to Him, we shall not fall.

The moment of recovery seems to have been while our Lord was passing from the earlier to the later examination before the rulers. In the very floodtide of Peter's oaths, the shrill cock-crow is heard, and at the sound the half-finished denial sticks in his throat. At the same moment he sees Jesus led past him, and that look, so full of love, reproof, and pardon, brought him back to loyalty, and saved him from despair. The assurance of Christ's knowledge of our sins against Him melts the heart, when the assurance of His forgiveness and tender love comes with it. Then tears, which are wholly humble but not wholly grief, flow. They do not wash away the sin, but they come from the assurance

that Christ's love, like a flood, has swept it away. They save from remorse, which has no healing in it.

II. We have the rude taunts of the servants. The mockery here comes from Jews, and is directed against Christ's prophetic character, while the later jeers of the Roman soldiers make a jest of His kingship. Each set lays hold of what seems to it most ludicrous in His pretensions, and these servants ape their masters on the judgment seat, in laughing to scorn this Galilean peasant who claimed to be the Teacher of them all. Rude natures have to take rude ways of expression, and the vulgar mockery meant precisely the same as more polite and covert scorn means from more polished people; namely, rooted disbelief in Him. These mockers were contented to take their opinions on trust from priests and rabbis. How often, since then, have Christ's servants been objects of popular odium at the suggestion of the same classes, and how often have the ignorant people been misled by their trust in their teachers to hate and persecute their true Master!

Jesus is silent under all the mockery, but then, as now, He knows who strikes Him. His eyes are open behind the bandage, and see the lifted hands and mocking lips. He will speak one day, and His speech will be detection and condemnation. Then He was silent, as patiently enduring shame and spitting for our sakes. Now He is silent, as long-suffering and wooing us to repentance; but He keeps count and record of men's revilings, and the day comes when He whose eyes are as a flame of fire will say to every foe, 'I know thy works.'

III. We have the formal rejection and condemnation by the council. The hearing recorded in verses 66 to 71 took place 'as soon as it was day,' and was apparently

a more formal official ratification of the proceedings of the earlier examination described by Matthew and John. The ruler's question was put simply in order to obtain material for the condemnation already resolved on. Our Lord's answer falls into two parts, in the first of which He in effect declines to recognise the *bona fides* of His judges and the competency of the tribunal, and in the second goes beyond their question, and claims participation in divine glory and power. 'If I tell you, ye will not believe'; therefore He will not tell them.

Jesus will not unfold His claims to those who only seek to hear them in order to reject, not to examine, them. Silence is His answer to ingrained prejudice masquerading as honest inquiry. It is ever so. There is small chance of truth at the goal if there be foregone conclusions or biased questions at the starting-point. 'If I ask you, ye will not answer.' They had taken refuge in judicious but self-condemning silence when He had asked them the origin of John's mission and the meaning of the One Hundred and Tenth Psalm, and thereby showed that they were not seeking light. Jesus will gladly speak with any who will be frank with Him, and let Him search their hearts; but He will not unfold His mission to such as refuse to answer His questions. But while thus He declines to submit Himself to that tribunal, and in effect accuses them of obstinate blindness and a fixed conclusion to reject the claims which they were pretending to examine, He will not leave them without once more asserting an even higher dignity than that of Messiah. As a prisoner at their bar, He has nothing to say to them; but as their King and future Judge, He has something. They desire to find materials for sentence of death, and though He will not give these in the character of a criminal before



His judges, He also desires that the sentence should pass, and He will declare His divine prerogatives and full possession of divine power in the hearing of the highest court of the nation.

It was fitting that the representatives of Israel, however prejudiced, should hear at that supreme moment the full assertion of full deity. It was fitting that Israel should condemn itself, by treating that claim as blasphemy. It was fitting that Jesus should bring about His death by His twofold claim—that made to the Sanhedrim, of being the Son of God, and that before Pilate, of being the King of the Jews.

The whole scene teaches us the voluntary character of Christ's Death, which is the direct result of this tremendous assertion. It carries our thoughts forward to the time when the criminal of that morning shall be the Judge, and the judges and we shall stand at His bar. It raises the solemn question, Did Jesus claim truly when He claimed divine power? If truly, do we worship Him? If falsely, what was He? It mirrors the principles on which He deals with men universally, answering 'him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols,' and meeting hypocritical pretences of seeking the truth about Him with silence, but ever ready to open His heart and the witness to His claims to the honest and docile spirits who are ready to accept His words, and glad to open their inmost secrets to Him.

### CHRIST'S LOOK

'And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.'—LUKE xxii. 61.

ALL four Evangelists tell the story of Peter's threefold denial and swift repentance, but we owe the know-

ledge of this look of Christ's to Luke only. The other Evangelists connect the sudden change in the denier with his hearing the cock crow only, but according to Luke there were two causes co-operating to bring about that sudden repentance, for, he says, 'Immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.' And we cannot doubt that it was the Lord's look enforcing the fulfilment of His prediction of the cock-crow that broke down the denier.

Now, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to weave a consecutive whole out of the four versions of the story of Peter's triple denial. But this at least is clear from them all, that Jesus was away at the upper, probably the raised, end of the great hall, and that if any of the three instances of denial took place within that building, it was at such a distance that neither could the words be heard, nor could a look from one end of it to the other have been caught. I think that if we try to localise, and picture the whole scene ourselves, we are obliged to suppose that that look, which smote Peter into swift collapse of penitence, came as the Lord Jesus was being led bound down the hall out through the porch, past the fire, and into the gloomy archway, on His road to further suffering. As He was thus brought for a moment close to him, 'the Lord turned and looked upon Peter,' and then He passed from his sight for ever, as he would fear.

I wish, then, to deal—although it must be very imperfectly and inadequately—with that look that changed this man. And I desire to consider two things about it: what it said, and what it did.

I. What it said.—It spoke of Christ's knowledge, of Christ's pain, of Christ's love.

Of Christ's knowledge—I have already suggested that we cannot suppose that the Prisoner at one end of the hall, intensely occupied with the questionings and argumentation of the priests, and with the false witnesses, could have heard the denial, given in tones subdued by the place, at the other end. Still less could He have heard the denials in louder tones, and accompanied with execrations, which seemed to have been repeated in the porch without. But as He passed the Apostle that look said: 'I heard them all—denials and oaths and passion; I heard them all.' No wonder that after the Resurrection, Peter, with that remembrance in his mind, fell at the Master's feet and said, 'Lord! Thou knowest all things. Thou didst know what Thou didst not hear, my muttered recreancy and treason, and my blurted out oaths of denial. Thou knowest all things.' No wonder that when he stood up amongst the Apostles after the Resurrection and the Ascension, and was the mouthpiece of their prayers, remembering this scene as well as other incidents, he began his prayer with 'Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men.' But let us remember that this—call it, if you like, supernatural—knowledge which Jesus Christ had of the denial, is only one of a great body of facts in His life, if we accept these Gospels, which show that, as one of the Evangelists says, at almost the beginning of his history, 'He needed not that any man should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.' It is precisely on the same line, as His first words to Peter, whom He greeted as he came to Him with 'Thou art Simon; thou shalt be Cephas.' It is entirely on the same line as the words with which He greeted another of this little group, 'When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee.' It is on the same line

as the words with which He penetrated to the unspoken thoughts of His churlish entertainer when He said, 'Simon! I have somewhat to say unto thee.' It is on the lines on which we have to think of that Lord now as knowing us all. He looks still from the judgment-seat, where He does not stand as a criminal, but sits as the supreme and omniscient Arbiter of our fates, and Judge of our actions. And He beholds us, each of us, moment by moment, as we go about our work, and often, by our cowardice, by our faithlessness, by our inconsistencies, 'deny the Lord that bought' us. It is an awful thought, and therefore do men put it away from them: 'Thou God seest me.' But it is stripped of all its awfulness, while it retains all its purifying and quickening power, when we think, as our old hymn has it:

'Though now ascended up on high,  
He bends on earth a Brother's eye.'

And we have not only to feel that the eye that looks upon us is cognisant of our denials, but that it is an eye that pities our infirmities, and knowing us altogether, loves us better than we know. Oh! if we believed in Christ's look, and that it was the look of infinite love, life would be less solitary, less sad, and we should feel that wherever His glance fell there His help was sure, and there were illumination and blessedness. The look spoke of Christ's knowledge.

Again, it spoke of Christ's pain. Peter had not thought that he was hurting his Master by his denials; he only thought of saving himself. And, perhaps, if it had come into his loving and impulsive nature, which yielded to the temptation the more readily because of the same impulsiveness which also led it



to yield swiftly to good influences, if he had thought that he was adding another pang to the pains of his Lord whom he had loved through all his denial, even his cowardice would have plucked up courage to 'confess, and deny not but confess,' that he belonged to the Christ. But he did not remember all that. And now there came into his mind—from that look, the bitter thought, 'I have wrung His heart with yet another pang, and at this supreme moment, when there is so much to rack and pain; I have joined the tormentors.'

And so, do we not pain Jesus Christ? Mysterious as it is, yet it seems as if, since it is true that we please Him when we are obeying Him, it must be somehow true that we pain Him when we deny Him, and some kind of shadow of grief may pass even over that glorified nature when we sin against Him, and forget Him, and repay His love with indifference, and reject His counsel. We know that in His earthly life there was no bitterer pang inflicted upon Him than the one which the Psalmist prophesied, 'He that ate bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me.' And we know that in the measure in which human nature is purified and perfected, in that measure does it become more susceptible and sensitive to the pain of faithless friends. Chilled love, rejected endeavours to help—which are, perhaps, the deepest and the most spiritual of sorrows which men can inflict upon one another, Jesus Christ experienced in full measure, heaped up and running over. And we, even we to-day, may be 'grieving the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption.' Christ's knowledge of the Apostle's denials brought pain to His heart.

Again, the look spoke of Christ's love. There was in

it saddened disapprobation, but there was not in it any spark of anger; nor what, perhaps, would be worse, any ice of withdrawal or indifference. But there even at that supreme moment, lied against by false witnesses, insulted and spit upon by rude soldiers, rejected by the priests as an impostor and a blasphemer, and on His road to the Cross, when, if ever, He might have been absorbed in Himself, was His heart at leisure from itself, and in divine and calm self-oblivion could think of helping the poor denier that stood trembling there beneath His glance. That is of a piece with the majestic, yet not repelling calm, which marks the Lord in all His life, and which reaches its very climax in the Passion and on the Cross. Just as, whilst nailed there, He had leisure to think of the penitent thief, and of the weeping mother, and of the disciple whose loss of his Lord would be compensated by the gaining of her to take care of, so as He was being borne to Pilate's judgment, He turned with a love that forgot itself, and poured itself into the denier's heart. Is not that a divine and eternal revelation for us? We speak of the love of a brother who, sinned against seventy times seven, yet forgives. We bow in reverence before the love of a mother who cannot forget, but must have compassion on the son of her womb. We wonder at the love of a father who goes out to seek the prodigal. But all these are less than that love which beamed lambent from the eye of Christ, as it fell on the denier, and which therein, in that one transitory glance, revealed for the faith and thankfulness of all ages an eternal fact. That love is steadfast as the heavens, firm as the foundations of the earth. 'Yea! the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My loving kindness shall not

depart, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed.' It cannot be frozen into indifference. It cannot be stirred into heat of anger. It cannot be provoked to withdrawal. Repelled, it returns; sinned against, it forgives; denied, it meekly beams on in self-revelation; it hopeth all things, it beareth all things. And He who, as He passed out to Pilate's bar, cast His look of love on the denier, is looking upon each of us, if we would believe it, with the same look, pitiful and patient, reproachful, and yet forgiving, which unveils all His love, and would fain draw us in answering love, to cast ourselves at His feet, and tell Him all our sin.

And now, let us turn to the second point that I suggested.

## II. What the look did.

First, it tore away the veil that hid Peter's sin from himself. He had not thought that he was doing anything wrong when he denied. He had not thought about anything but saving his own skin. If he had reflected for a moment no doubt he would have found excuses, as we all can do. But when Christ stood there, what had become of the excuses? As by a flash he saw the ugliness of the deed that he himself had done. And there came, no doubt, into his mind in aggravation of the denial, all that had passed from that very first day when he had come to Christ's presence, all the confidences that had been given to him, how his wife's mother had been healed, how he himself had been cared for and educated, how he had been honoured and distinguished, how he had boasted and vowed and hectoring the day before. And so he 'went out and wept bitterly.'

Now *our sin* captures us by lying to us, by blinding our consciences. You cannot hear the shouts of the men on the bank warning you of your danger when you are in the midst of the rapids, and so our sin deafens us to the still small voice of conscience. But nothing so surely reveals to us the true moral character of any of our actions, be they right or wrong, as bringing them under Christ's eye, and thinking to ourselves, 'Durst I do that if He stood there beside me and saw it?' Peter could deny Him when He was at the far end of the hall. He could not have denied Him if he had had Him by his side. And if we will take our actions, especially any of them about which we are in doubt, into His presence, then it will be wonderful how conscience will be enlightened and quickened, how the fiend will start up in his own shape, and how poor and small the motives which tempted so strongly to do wrong will come to look, when we think of adducing them to Jesus. What did a maid-servant's flippant tongue matter to Peter then? And how wretchedly inadequate the reason for his denial looked when Christ's eye fell upon him. The most recent surgical method of treating skin diseases is to bring an electric light, ten times as strong as the brightest street lights, to bear upon the diseased patch, and fifty minutes of that search-light clears away the disease. Bring the beam from Christ's eye to bear on your lives, and you will see a great deal of leprosy, and scurf, and lupus, and all that you see will be cleared away. The look tore down the veil.

What more did it do? It melted the denier's heart into sorrow. I can quite understand a conscience being so enlightened as to be convinced of the evil of



a certain course, and yet there being none of that melting into sorrow, which, as I believe, is absolutely necessary for any permanent victory over sins. No man will ever conquer his evil as long as he only shudderingly recoils from it. He has to be broken down into the penitential mood before he will secure the victory over his sin. You remember the profound words in our Lord's pregnant parable of the seeds, how one class which transitorily was Christian, had for its characteristic that immediately with joy they received the word. Yes; a Christianity that puts repentance into a parenthesis, and talks about faith only, will never underlie a permanent and thorough moral reformation. There is nothing that brings 'godly sorrow,' so surely as a glimpse of Christ's love; and nothing that reveals the love so certainly as the 'look.' You may hammer at a man's heart with law, principle, and moral duty, and all the rest of it, and you may get him to feel that he is a very poor creature, but unless the sunshine of Christ's love shines down upon him, there will be no melting, and if there is no melting there will be no permanent bettering.

And there was another thing that the look did. It tore away the veil from the sin; it made rivers of water flow from the melted heart in sorrow of true repentance; and it kept the sorrow from turning into despair. Judas 'went out and hanged himself.' Peter 'went out and wept bitterly.' What made the one the victim of remorse, and the other the glad child of repentance? How was it that the one was stiffened into despair that had no tears, and the other was saved because he could weep? Because the one saw his sin in the lurid light of an awakened conscience, and the other saw his sin in the loving look of a

pardoning Lord. And that is how you and I ought to see our sins. Be sure, dear friend, that the same long-suffering, patient love is looking down upon each of us, and that if we will, like Peter, let the look melt us into penitent self-distrust and heart-sorrow for our clinging sins, then Jesus will do for us, as He did for that penitent denier on the Resurrection morning. He will take us apart by ourselves and speak healing words of forgiveness and reconciliation, so that we, like him, will dare in spite of our faithlessness, to fall at His feet and say, 'Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I, erst faithless and treacherous, love Thee; and all the more because Thou hast forgiven the denial and restored the denier.'

### 'THE RULERS TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER'

'And the whole multitude of them arose, and led Him unto Pilate. 2. And they began to accuse Him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King. 3. And Pilate asked Him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And He answered him and said, Thou sayest it. 4. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. 5. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. 6. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilæan. 7. And as soon as he knew that He belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. 8. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. 9. Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing. 10. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. 11. And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate. 12. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.'—LUKE xxiii. 1-12.

LUKE's canvas is all but filled by the persecutors, and gives only glimpses of the silent Sufferer. But the silence of Jesus is eloquent, and the prominence of the accusers and judges heightens the impression of His passive endurance. We have in this passage the

Jewish rulers with their murderous hate; Pilate contemptuously indifferent, but perplexed and wishing to shirk responsibility; and Herod with his frivolous curiosity. They present three types of unworthy relations to Jesus Christ.

I. We see first the haters of Jesus. So fierce is their hatred that they swallow the bitter pill of going to Pilate for the execution of their sentence. John tells us that they began by trying to get Pilate to decree the crucifixion without knowing Jesus' crime; but that was too flagrant injustice, and too blind confidence in them, for Pilate to grant. So they have to manufacture a capital charge on the spot, and they are equal to the occasion. By the help of two lies, and one truth so twisted as to be a lie, they get up an indictment, which they think will be grave enough to compel the procurator to do as they wish.

Their accusation, if it had been ever so true, would have been ludicrous on their lips; and we may be sure that, if it had been true, they would have been Jesus' partisans, not His denouncers. 'The Gracchi complaining of sedition' are nothing to the Sanhedrim accusing a Jew of rebellion against Rome. Every man in that crowd was a rebel at heart, and would have liked nothing better than to see the standard of revolt lifted in a strong hand. Pilate was not so simple as to be taken in by such an accusation from such accusers, and it fails. They return to the charge, and the 'more urgent' character of the second attempt is found in its statement of the widespread extent of Christ's teaching, but chiefly in the cunning introduction of Galilee, notoriously a disaffected and troublesome district.

What a hideous and tragic picture we have here of the ferocity of the hatred, which turned the very

fountains of justice and guardians of a nation into lying plotters against innocence, and sent these Jewish rulers cringing before Pilate, pretending loyalty and acknowledging his authority! They were ready for any falsehood and any humiliation, if only they could get Jesus crucified. And what had excited their hatred? Chiefly His teachings, which brushed aside the rubbish both of ceremonial observance and of Rabbinical casuistry, and placed religion in love to God and consequent love to man; then His attitude of opposition to them as an order; and finally His claim, which they never deigned to examine, to be the Son of God. That, they said, was blasphemy, as it was, unless it were true,—an alternative which they did not look at. So blinded may men be by prejudice, and so mastered by causeless hatred of Him who loves them all!

These Jewish rulers were men like ourselves. Instead of shuddering at their crime, as if it were something far outside of anything possible for us, we do better if we learn from it the terrible depths of hostility to Jesus, the tragic blindness to His character and love, and the degradation of submission to usurpers, which must accompany denial of His right to rule over us. 'They hated Me without a cause,' said Christ; but He pointed to that hatred as sure to be continued towards Him and His servants as long as 'the world' continues the world.

II. We have Pilate, indifferent and perplexed. Luke's very brief account should be supplemented by John's, which shows us how important the conversation, so much abbreviated by Luke, was. Of course Pilate knew the priests and rulers too well to believe for a moment that the reason they gave for bringing Jesus



to him was the real one, and his taking Jesus apart to speak with Him shows a wish to get at the bottom of the case. So far he was doing his duty, but then come the faults. These may easily be exaggerated, and we should remember that Pilate was the most ignorant, and therefore the least guilty, of all the persons mentioned in this passage. He had probably never heard the name of Jesus till that day, and saw nothing but an ordinary Jewish peasant, whom his countrymen, like the incomprehensible and troublesome people they were, wished, for some fantastic reason, to get killed.

But that dialogue with his Prisoner should have sunk deeper into his mind and heart. He was in long and close enough contact with Jesus to have seen glimpses of the light, which, if followed, would have led to clear recognition. His first sin was indifference, not unmingled with scorn, and it blinded him. Christ's lofty and wonderful explanation of the nature of His kingdom and His mission to bear witness to the truth fell on entirely preoccupied ears, which were quick enough to catch the faintest whispers of treason, but dull towards 'truth.' When Jesus tried to reach his conscience by telling him that every lover of truth would listen to His voice, he only answered by the question, to which he waited not for an answer, 'What is truth?'

That was not the question of a theoretical sceptic, but simply of a man who prided himself on being 'practical,' and left all talk about such abstractions to dreamers. The limitations of the Roman intellect and its characteristic over-estimate of deeds and contempt for pure thought, as well as the spirit of the governor, who would let men think what they chose, as long as they did not rebel, spoke in the question. Pilate is an

instance of a man blinded to all lofty truth and to the beauty and solemn significance of Christ's words, by his absorption in outward life. He thinks of Jesus as a harmless fanatic. Little did he know that the truth, which he thought moonshine, would shatter the Empire, which he thought the one solid reality. So-called practical men commit the same mistake in every generation. 'All flesh is as grass; . . . the word of the Lord endureth for ever.'

Further, Pilate sinned in prostituting his office by not setting free the prisoner when he was convinced of His innocence. 'I find no fault in this man,' should have been followed by immediate release. Every moment afterwards, in which He was kept captive, was the condemnation of the unjust judge. He was clearly anxious to keep his troublesome subjects in good humour, and thought that the judicial murder of one Jew was a small price to pay for popularity. Still he would have been glad to have escaped from what his official training had taught him to recoil from, and what some faint impression, made by his patient prisoner, gave him a strange dread of. So he grasps at the mention of Galilee, and tries to gain two good ends at once by handing Jesus over to Herod.

The relations between Antipas and him were necessarily delicate, like those between the English officials and the rajahs of native states in India; and there had been some friction, perhaps about 'the Galileans, whose blood' he 'had mingled with their sacrifices.' If there had been difficulties in connection with such a question of jurisdiction, the despatch of Jesus to Herod would be a graceful way of making the *amende honorable*, and would also shift an unpleasant decision on to Herod's shoulders. Pilate would not be displeased to

get rid of embarrassment, and to let Herod be the tool of the priests' hate.

How awful the thought is of the contrast between Pilate's conceptions of what he was doing and the reality! How blind to Christ's beauty it is possible to be, when engrossed with selfish aims and outward things! How near a soul may be to the light, and yet turn away from it and plunge into darkness! How patient that silent prisoner, who lets Himself be bandied about from one tyrant to another, not because they had power, but because He loved the world, and would bear the sins of every one of us! How terrible the change when these unjust judges and He will change places, and Pilate and Herod stand at His judgment-seat!

III. We have the wretched, frivolous Herod. This is the murderer of John Baptist—'that fox,' a debauchee, a coward, and as cruel as sensuous. He had all the vices of his worthless race, and none of the energy of its founder. He is by far the most contemptible of the figures in this passage. Note his notion of, and his feeling to, Jesus. He thought of our Lord as of a magician or juggler, who might do some wonders to amuse the vacuous *ennui* of his sated nature. Time was when he had felt some twinge of conscience in listening to the Baptist, and had almost been lifted to nobleness by that strong arm. Time was, too, when he had trembled at hearing of Jesus, and taken Him for his victim risen from a bloody grave. But all that is past now. The sure way to stifle conscience is to neglect it. Do that long and resolutely enough, and it will cease to utter unheeded warnings. There will be a silence which may look like peace, but is really death. Herod's gladness was more awful and really sad than

Herod's fear. Better to tremble at God's word than to treat it as an occasion for mirth. He who hates a prophet because he knows him to be a prophet and himself to be a sinner, is not so hopeless as he who only expects to get sport out of the messenger of God.

Then note the Lord's silence. Herod plies Jesus with a battery of questions, and gets no answer. If there had been a grain of earnestness in them all, Christ would have spoken. He never is silent to a true seeker after truth. But it is fitting that frivolous curiosity should be unanswered, and there is small likelihood of truth being found at the goal when there is nothing more noble than that temper at the starting-point. Christ's silence is the penalty of previous neglect of Christ's and His forerunner's words. Jesus guides His conduct by His own precept, 'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs'; and He knows, as we never can, who come into that terrible list of men to whom it would only add condemnation to speak of even His love. The eager hatred of the priests followed Jesus to Herod's palace, but no judicial action is recorded as taking place there. Their fierce earnestness of hate seems out of place in the frivolous atmosphere. The mockery, in which Herod is not too dignified to join his soldiers, is more in keeping. But how ghastly it sounds to us, knowing whom they ignorantly mocked! Cruelty, inane laughter, hideous pleasure in an innocent man's pain, disregard of law and justice—all these they were guilty of; and Herod, at any rate, knew enough of Jesus to give a yet darker colouring to his share in the coarse jest.

But how the loud laugh would have fallen silent if some flash had told who Jesus was! Is there any of



our mirth, perhaps at some of His servants, or at some phase of His gospel, which would in like manner stick in our throats if His judgment throne blazed above us? Ridicule is a dangerous weapon. It does more harm to those who use it than to those against whom it is directed. Herod thought it an exquisite jest to dress up his prisoner as a king; but Herod has found out, by this time, whether he or the Nazarene was the sham monarch, and who is the real one. Christ was as silent under mockery as to His questioner. He bears all, and He takes account of all. He bears it because He is the world's Sacrifice and Saviour. He takes account of it, and will one day recompense it, because He is the world's King, and will be its Judge. Where shall we stand then—among the silenced mockers, or among the happy trusters in His Passion and subjects of His dominion?

### A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

'Then Herod questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing.'—LUKE xxiii. 9.

FOUR Herods play their parts in the New Testament story. The first of them is the grim old tiger who slew the infants at Bethlehem, and soon after died. This Herod is the second—a cub of the litter, with his father's ferocity and lust, but without his force. The third is the Herod of the earlier part of the Acts of the Apostles, a grandson of the old man, who dipped his hands in the blood of one Apostle, and would fain have slain another. And the last is Herod Agrippa, a son of the third, who is only remembered because he once came across Paul's path, and thought it such a

good jest that anything should be supposed capable of making a Christian out of *him*.

There is a singular family likeness in the whole of them, and a very ugly likeness it is. This one was sensual, cruel, cunning, infirm of purpose, capricious like a child or a savage. Roman policy amused him with letting him play at being a ruler, but kept him well in hand. And I suppose he was made a worse man by the difficulties of his position as a subject-prince.

Now I wish to put together the various incidents in this man's life recorded in the Gospels, and try to gather some lessons from them for you.

I. First, I take him as an example of half-and-half convictions, and of the inner discord that comes from these.

I do not need to remind you of the shameful story of his repudiation of his own wife, and of his disgusting alliance with the wife of his half-brother, who was herself his niece. She was the stronger spirit, a Biblical Lady Macbeth, the Jezebel to this Ahab; and, to complete the parallel, Elijah was not far away. John the Baptist's outspoken remonstrances of course made an implacable enemy of Herodias, who did all she could to compass his death, but was unable to manage that, though she secured his imprisonment. The reason for her inability is given by the Evangelist Mark, in words which are very inadequately rendered by our Authorised Version, but may be found more correctly translated in the Revised Version. It is there said that King 'Herod feared John'—the gaoler afraid of his prisoner!—'knowing that he was a just man and a holy'—goodness is awful. The worst men know it, and it

extorts respect. 'And kept him safe'—from Herodias, that is. 'And when he heard him he was perplexed'—drawn this way and that way by these two magnets, alternately veering to lust and to purity, hesitating between the kisses of the beautiful temptress at his side and the words of the prophet. And yet, with strange inconsistency, in all his vacillations 'he heard him gladly'; for his better part approved the nobler voice. And so he staggered on, having religion enough to spoil some of his sinful delights, but not enough to shake them off.

That is a picture for which in its essence many a man and woman among us might have sat. For I suppose that there is nothing more common than these half-and-half convictions which, like inefficient bullets, get part way through the armoured shell of a ship, and there stick harmless. Many of us have the clearest convictions in our understandings, which have never penetrated to that innermost chamber of all, where the will sits sovereign. It is so about little things, it is so about great ones. Nothing is more common than that a man shall know perfectly well that some possibly trivial habit stands in the way of something that it is his interest or his duty to pursue; but the knowledge lies inoperative in the outermost part of him. It is so in regard to graver things. The majority of the slaves of any vice whatsoever know perfectly well that they ought to give it up, and yet nothing comes of the conviction.

'He was much perplexed.' What a picture that is of the state of unrest and conflict into which such half-and-half impressions of duty cast a man. Such a one is like a vessel with its head now East, now

West, because there is some weak or ignorant steersman at the helm. I know nothing more sure to produce inward unrest and disturbance and desolation than that a man's knowledge of duty should be clear, and his obedience to that knowledge partial. If we have John down in the dungeon, if conscience is not allowed to be master, there may be feasting and revelry going on above, but the stern voice will come up through the grating now and then, and that will spoil all the laughter. 'When he heard him, he was much perplexed.'

The reason for these imperfect convictions is generally found, as Herod shows us, in the unwillingness to get rid of something which has fastened its claws around us, and which we love too well, although we know it is a serpent, to shake off. If Herod had once been man enough to screw himself up, and say to Herodias, 'Now you pack, and go about your business!' everything else would have come right in time. But he could not make up his mind to sacrifice the honeyed poison, and so everything went wrong in time. My friend, how many of us are prevented from following out our clearest convictions because they demand a sacrifice? 'If thine eye cause thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee.'

And then, further, note that these irresolute convictions and shirking of plain duty are not atoned for by, though they are often accompanied with, a strange acquiescence in, and approval of, God's truth. Herod fancied, inconsistently enough, that he was making some kind of compensation for disobedience to the message, by liking to listen to the messenger. And there are a great many of us, all whose Christianity



consists in giving ear to the words which we never think of obeying. I wonder how many of you there are who fancy that you have no more concern with this sermon of mine than approving or disapproving of it, as the case may be; and how many of us there are who, all our lives long, have substituted criticism of the Gospel as ministered by us poor preachers—be it approving or disapproving criticism—for obedience to the Christ and acceptance of His salvation.

II. We see in Herod an example of the utter powerlessness of such partial convictions and reformation.

I am not going to tell over again the ghastly story of John's death, which no other words than the Evangelist's can tell half so powerfully. I need only remind you of the degradation of the poor child Salome to the position of a dancing girl, the half-tipsy generosity of the excited monarch, the grim request from lips so young and still reddened by the excitement of the dance, Herod's unavailing sorrow, his fantastic sense of honour which scrupled to break a wicked promise, but did not scruple to kill a righteous man, and the ghastly picture of the girl carrying a bleeding head—such a gift!—to her mother.

But out of that jumble of lust and blood I desire to gather one lesson. There you have—in an extreme form, it is true—a tremendous illustration of what half-and-half convictions may come to. Whether or no we ever get anything like as far on the road as this man did matters very little. The process which brought him there is the thing that I seek to point to. It was because he had so long tampered with the voice of his conscience that it was lulled into silence at that last critical moment. And this is always the case, that

if a man is false to the feeblest conviction that he has in regard to the smallest duty, he is a worse man all over ever after. We cannot neglect any conviction of what we ought to do, without lowering the whole tone of our characters and laying ourselves open to assaults of evil from which we would once have turned shuddering and disgusted. A partial thaw is generally followed by intenser frost. An abortive insurrection is sure to issue in a more grinding tyranny. A soul half melted and then cooled off is less easy to melt than it was before. And so, dear brethren, remember this, that if you do not swiftly and fully carry out in life and conduct whatsoever you know you ought to be or do, you cannot set a limit to what, some time or other, if a strong and sudden temptation is sprung upon you, you may become. 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' Yes! But he did it. No mortal reaches the extreme of evil all at once, says the wise old proverb; and the path by which a man is let down into depths that he never thought it was possible that he should traverse is by the continual neglect of the small admonitions of conscience. Neglected convictions mean, sooner or later, an outburst of evil.

John's murder may illustrate another thing too—viz. how simple, facile weakness of character may be the parent of all enormities. Herod did not want to kill John. He very much wanted to keep him alive. But he was not man enough to put his foot down, and say, 'There! I have said it; and there is to be no more talk about slaying this prophet of God.' So the continual drop, drop, drop, of Herodias' suggestions and wishes wore a hole in the loose-textured stone at last; and he did the thing that he hated to do and had

long fought against. Why? Because he was a poor weak creature.

The lesson from this is one that I would urge upon all you young people especially, that in a world like this, where there are so many more voices soliciting us to evil than inviting us to good, to be weak is, in the long run, to be wicked. So do you cultivate the wholesome habit of saying 'No,' and do not be afraid of anything but of hurting your conscience and sinning against God.

III. Once more, we have in Herod an example of the awakening of conscience.

When Jesus began to be talked about beyond the narrow limits of the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and especially when He began to organise the Apostolate, and His name was spread abroad, some rumours reached even the court, and there were divergent opinions about Him. One man said, It is Elias; and another said, It is a prophet, 'and Herod said, It is John, whom I beheaded. He has risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.'

Ah, brethren! when a man has, away back in the chambers of his memory, some wrong thing, be it great or be it little, he is at the mercy of any chance or accident to have it revived in all its vividness. It is an awful thing to walk this world with a whole magazine of combustibles in our memories, on which any spark may fall and light lurid and sulphurous flames. A chance thing may do it, a scent, a look upon a face, a sound, or any trifle may bring all at once before the wrongdoer that ancient evil. And no lapse of time makes it less dreadful when it is unveiled. The chance thrust of a boat-hook that gets tangled in the grey

hairs of a corpse, brings it up grim to the surface. Press a button, by accident, upon a wall in some old castle, and a door flies open that leads away down into black depths. You and I have depths of that sort in our hearts. Then there are no more illusions about whose fault the deed was. When Herod killed John, he said, 'Oh! It is not I! It is Herodias. It is Salome. It is my oath. It is the respect I bear to the people who heard me swear. I must do it, but I am not responsible.' But when, in 'the sessions of silent thought,' the deed came back to him, Salome and Herodias, the oath, and the company were all out of sight, and he said, 'I! *I* did it.'

That is what we all shall have to do some day, in this world possibly, in the next certainly. Men sophisticate themselves with talk about palliations, and excuses, and temptations, and companions and the like. And philosophers sophisticate themselves nowadays with a great many learned explanations, which tend to show that a man is not to blame for the wrong things he does. But all that rubbish gets burned up when conscience wakes, and the doer says, 'Whom *I* beheaded.'

Brethren, unless we take refuge in the great sacrifice for the sins of the world which Jesus Christ has made, we shall, possibly in this life, and certainly hereafter, be surrounded by a company of our own evil deeds risen from the dead, and every one of them will shake its gory locks at us, and say, '*Thou* didst it.'

IV. The last lesson that I gather from this man's life is the final insensibility which these half-and-half convictions tend to produce.

Jesus Christ was sent by Pilate to Herod as a kind of peace-offering. The two had been squabbling about



some question of jurisdiction ; and so, partly to escape from the embarrassment of having to deal with this enigmatical Prisoner, and partly out of a piece of politic politeness, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod, because He was in his jurisdiction. Think of the Lord of men and angels being handed about from one to the other of these two scoundrels, as a piece of politeness !

When Christ stands before Herod, note that all its former convictions, partial or entire, and all its terrors, superficial or deep, have faded clean away from this frivolous soul. All that he feels now is a childish delight in having this well-known Man before him, and a hope that, for his delectation, Jesus will work a miracle ; much as he might expect a conjurer to do one of his tricks ! That is what killing John came to—an incapacity to see anything in Jesus.

‘And he asked Him many questions, and Jesus answered him nothing.’ He locked His lips. Why ? He was doing what He Himself enjoined : ‘Give not that which is holy to the dogs. Cast not your pearls before swine.’ He said nothing, because He knew it was useless to say anything. So the Incarnate Word, whose very nature and property it is to speak, was silent before the frivolous curiosity of the man that had been false to his deepest convictions.

It is a parable, brother, of what is being repeated over and over again amongst us. I dare not say that Jesus Christ is ever absolutely dumb to any man on this side of the grave ; but I dare not refrain from saying that this condition of insensibility to His words is one that we may indefinitely approach, and that the surest way to approach it and to reach it is to fight down, or to neglect, the convictions that lead up to Him. John was the forerunner of Christ, and if

Herod had listened to John, to him John would have said: 'Behold the Lamb of God!' To you I say it, and beseech you to take that Lamb of God as the Sacrifice for your sins, for the Healer and Cleanser of your memories and your consciences, for the Helper who will enable you joyfully to make all sacrifices to duty, and to carry into effect every conviction which His own merciful hand writes upon your hearts.

And oh, dear friends, many of you strangers to me, to whom my voice seldom comes, let me plead with you not to be content with 'hearing' any of us 'gladly,' but to do what our words point to, and to follow Christ the Saviour. If you hear the Gospel, however imperfectly, as you are hearing it proclaimed now, and if you neglect it as—must I say?—you are doing now, you will bring another film over your eyes which may grow thick enough to shut out all the light; you will wind another fold about your hearts which may prove impenetrable to the sword of the Spirit; you will put another plug in your ears which may make them deaf to the music of Christ's voice. Do what you know you ought to do, yield yourselves to Jesus Christ. And do it now, whilst impressions are being made, lest, if you let them sleep, they may never return. Felix trembled when Paul reasoned; but he waved away the messenger and the message, and though he sent for Paul often, and communed with him, he never trembled any more.

'There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the flood,'

would lead us into the haven of rest in Christ; and, if allowed to pass, may leave us, stranded and shipwrecked, among the rocks,

## JESUS AND PILATE

'And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14. Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him: 15. No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him: and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him. 16. I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him. 17. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) 18. And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: 19. (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) 20. Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. 21. But they cried, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him. 22. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him: I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go. 23. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. 24. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. 25. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will. 26. And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.'—LUKE xxiii. 13-26.

LUKE here marks out three stages of the struggle between Pilate and the Jews. Thrice did he try to release Jesus; thrice did they yell their hatred and their demand for His blood. Then came the shameful surrender by Pilate, in which, from motives of policy, he prostituted Roman justice. Knowingly he sacrificed one poor Jew to please his turbulent subjects; unknowingly he slew the Christ of God.

I. The first weak attempt to be just.

Pilate invested it with a certain formality by convoking a representative gathering of all classes, 'chief priests and the rulers and the people.' The nation was summoned to decide solemnly whether they would or would not put their Messiah to death, and a Roman governor was their summoner. Surely the irony of fate (or, rather, of Providence) could go no further than that. Pilate's *résumé* of the proceedings up to the moment of his speaking is not without a touch of

sarcasm, in the contrast between 'ye' and 'I' and 'Herod.' It is almost as if he had said, 'Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that you should have a quicker scent for rebellion than I or Herod!' He was evidently suspicious of the motives which induced the 'rulers' to take the new rôle of eager defenders of Roman authority, and ready to suspect something below such an extraordinary transformation. Jews delivering up a Jew because he was an insurgent against Cæsar, —there must be something under that! He lays stress on their having heard his examination of the accused, as showing that he had gone into the matter thoroughly, that the charges had broken down to their knowledge. He represents his sending Jesus to Herod as done from the high motive of securing the completest possible investigation, instead of its being a despicable attempt to shirk responsibility and to pay an empty compliment to an enemy. He reiterates his conviction of Jesus' innocence, and then, after all this flourish about his own carefulness to bring judicial impartiality to bear on the case, he makes the lame and impotent conclusion of offering to 'chastise Him.'

What for? The only course for a judge convinced of a prisoner's innocence is to set him free. But this was a bribe to the accusers, offered in hope that the smaller punishment would content them. Pilate knew that he was perpetrating flagrant injustice in such a suggestion, and he tried to hide it by using a gentle word. 'Chastise' sounds almost beneficent, but it would not make the scourging less cruel, nor its infliction less lawless. Compromises are always ticklish to engineer, but a compromise between justice and injustice is least likely of all to answer. This one signally failed. The



fierce accusers of Jesus were quick to see the sign of weakness, both in the proposal itself and in their being asked if it would be acceptable to them. Not so should a Roman governor have spoken. If pressure had made the iron wall yield so far, a little more and it would fall flat, and let them at their victim.

Pilate was weak, vacillating, did not know what he wished. He wished to do right, but he wished more to conciliate, for he knew that he was detested, and feared to be accused to Rome. The other side knew what they wanted, and were resolute. Encouraged by the hesitation of Pilate, they 'cried out all together.' One hears the strident yells from a thousand throats shrieking out the self-revealing and self-destroying choice of Barabbas. He was a popular hero for the very reason that he was a rebel. He had done what his admirers had accused Jesus of doing, and for which they pretended that they had submitted Him to Pilate's judgment. The choice of Barabbas convicts the charges against Jesus of falsehood and unreality. The choice of Barabbas reveals the national ideal. They did not want a Messiah like Jesus, and had no eyes for the beauty of His character, nor ears for the words of grace poured into His lips. They had no horror of 'a murderer,' and great admiration for a rebel. Barabbas was the man after their own heart. A nation that can reject Jesus and choose Barabbas is only fit for destruction. A nation judges itself by its choice of heroes. The national ideal is potent to shape the national character. We to-day are sinking into an abyss because of our admiration for the military type of hero; and there is not such an immense difference between the mob that rejected Jesus and applauded Barabbas and the mobs that shout round a successful

soldier, and scoff at the law of Christ if applied to politics.

## II. The second, weaker attempt.

Pilate repeated his proposal of release, but it was all but lost in the roar of hatred. Note the contrast between 'Pilate spoke' (v. 20) and 'they shouted.' It suggests his feeble effort swept away by the rush of ferocity. And they have gathered boldness from his hesitation, and are now prescribing the mode of Christ's punishment. Now first the terrible word 'Crucify' is heard. Both Matthew and Mark tell us that the priests and rulers had 'stirred up' the people to choose Barabbas, but apparently the mob, once roused, needed no further stimulant.

Crowds are always cruel, and they are as fickle as cruel. The very throats now hoarse with fiercely roaring 'Crucify Him' had been strained by shouting 'Hosanna' less than a week since. The branches strewed in His path had not had time to wither. 'The voice of the people is the voice of God,'—sometimes. But sometimes it sounds very like the voice of the enemy of God, and one would have more confidence in it if it did not so often and so quickly speak, not only 'in divers,' but in diverse, 'manners.' To make it the arbiter of men's merit, still more to trim one's course so as to catch the breeze of the popular breath, is folly, or worse. Men admire what they resemble, or try to resemble, and Barabbas has more of his sort than has Jesus.

## III. The final yielding.

It is to Pilate's credit that he kept up his efforts so long. Luke wishes to impress us with his persistency, as well as with the fixed determination of the Jews, by his note of 'the third time.' Thrice was the choice

offered to them, and thrice did they put away the possibility of averting their doom. But Pilate's persistency had a weak place, for he was afraid of his subjects, and, while willing to save Jesus, was not willing to imperil himself in doing it. Self-interest takes the strength out of resolution to do right, like a crumbling stone in a sea wall, which lets in the wave that ruins the whole structure.

Pilate had come to the end of his shifts to escape pronouncing sentence. The rulers had refused to judge Jesus according to their law. Herod had sent Him back with thanks, but unsentenced. The Jews would not have Him, but Barabbas, released, nor would they accept scourging in lieu of crucifying. So he has to decide at last whether to be just and fear not, or basely to give way, and draw down on his head momentary applause at the price of everlasting horror. Luke notices in all three stages the loud cries of the Jews, and in this last one he gives special emphasis to them. 'Their voices prevailed.' What a condemnation for a judge! He 'gave sentence that what they asked for should be done.' Baseness in a judge could go no farther. The repetition of the characterisation of Barabbas brings up once more the hideousness of the people's choice, and the tragic words 'to their will' sets in a ghastly light the flagrant injustice of the judge, and yet greater crime of the Jews. To deliver Jesus to their will was base; to entertain such a 'will' towards Jesus was more than base,—it was 'the ruin of them, and of all Israel.' Our whole lives here and hereafter turn on what is our 'will' to Him.

## WORDS FROM THE CROSS

'And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. 34. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted His raiment, and cast lots. 35. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God. 36. And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him and offering Him vinegar. 37. And saying, if Thou be the king of the Jews, save Thyself. 38. And a superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. 40. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41. And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss. 42. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. 43. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise. 44. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45. And the sun was darkened, and the vail of the temple was rent in the midst. 46. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.'—LUKE xxiii. 33-46.

THE calm tone of all the narratives of the Crucifixion is very remarkable. Each Evangelist limits himself to the bare recording of facts, without a trace of emotion. They felt too deeply to show feeling. It was fitting that the story which, till the end of time, was to move hearts to a passion of love and devotion, should be told without any colouring. Let us beware of reading it coldly! This passage is more adapted to be pondered in solitude, with the thought, 'All this was borne for me,' than to be commented on. But a reverent word or two is permissible.

Luke's account is noticeably independent of the other three. The three sayings of Christ's, round which his narrative is grouped, are preserved by him alone. We shall best grasp the dominant impression which the Evangelist unconsciously had himself received, and sought to convey, by gathering the whole round these three words from the Cross.



I. The first word sets Jesus forth as the all-merciful intercessor and patient friend of sinners. It is very significantly set in the centre of the paragraph (vs. 33-38) which recounts the heartless cruelty and mockery of soldiers and rulers. Surrounded by that whirlwind of abuse, contempt and ferocious glee at His sufferings, He gave back no taunt, nor uttered any cry of pain, nor was moved to the faintest anger, but let His heart go out in pity for all who took part in that wicked tragedy; and, while 'He opened not His mouth' in complaint or reviling, He did open it in intercession. But the wonderful prayer smote no heart with compunction, and, after it, the storm of mocking and savage triumph hurtled on as before.

Luke gathers all the details together in summary fashion, and piles them on one another without enlarging on any. The effect produced is like that of a succession of breakers beating on some lonely rock, or of blows struck by a battering-ram on a fortress.

'They crucified Him,'—there is no need to say who 'they' were. Others than the soldiers, who did the work, did the deed. Contempt gave Him two malefactors for companions and hung the King of the Jews in the place of honour in the midst. Did John remember what his brother and he had asked? Matter-of-fact indifference as to a piece of military duty, and shameless greed, impelled the legionaries to cast lots for the clothes stripped from a living man. What did the crucifying of another Jew or two matter to them? Gaping curiosity, and the strange love of the horrible, so strong in the vulgar mind, led the people, who had been shouting Hosanna! less than a week ago, to stand gazing on the sight without pity but in a few hearts.

The bitter hatred of the rulers, and their inhuman glee at getting rid of a heretic, gave them bad pre-eminence in sin. Their scoff acknowledged that He had 'saved others,' and their hate had so blinded their eyes that they could not see how manifestly His refusal to use His power to save Himself proved Him the Son of God. He could not save Himself, just because He would save these scoffing Rabbis and all the world. The rough soldiers knew little about Him, but they followed suit, and thought it an excellent jest to bring the 'vinegar,' provided in kindness, to Jesus with a mockery of reverence as to a king. The gibe was double-barrelled, like the inscription over the Cross; for it was meant to hit both this Pretender to royalty and His alleged subjects.

And to all this Christ's sole answer was the ever-memorable prayer. One of the women who bravely stood at the Cross must have caught the perhaps low-voiced supplication, and it breathed so much of the aspect of Christ's character in which Luke especially delights that he could not leave it out. It opens many large questions which cannot be dealt with here. All sin has in it an element of ignorance, but it is not wholly ignorance as some modern teachers affirm. If the ignorance were complete, the sin would be non-existent. The persons covered by the ample folds of this prayer were ignorant in very different degrees, and had had very different opportunities of changing ignorance for knowledge. The soldiers and the rulers were in different positions in that respect. But none were so entirely blind that they had no sin, and none were so entirely seeing that they were beyond the reach of Christ's pity or the power of His intercession. In that prayer we learn, not only His infinite forgiving-

ness for insults and unbelief levelled at Himself, but His exaltation as the Intercessor, whom the Father heareth always. The dying Christ prayed for His enemies; the glorified Christ lives to make intercession for us.

II. In the second saying Christ is revealed as having the keys of Hades, the invisible world of the dead. How differently the same circumstances work on different natures! In the one malefactor, physical agony and despair found momentary relief in taunts, flung from lips dry with torture, at the fellow-sufferer whose very innocence provoked hatred from the guilty heart. The other had been led by his punishment to recognise in it the due reward of his deeds, and thus softened, had been moved by Christ's prayer, and by his knowledge of Christ's innocence, to hope that the same mercy which had been lavished on the inflictors of His sufferings, might stretch to enfold the partakers in it.

At that moment the dying thief had clearer faith in Christ's coming in His kingdom than any of the disciples had. Their hopes were crumbling as they watched Him hanging unresisting and gradually dying. But this man looked beyond the death so near for both Jesus and himself, and believed that, after it, He would come to reign. We may call him the only disciple that Christ then had.

How pathethic is that petition, 'Remember me'! It builds the hope of sharing in Christ's royalty on the fact of having shared in His Cross. 'Thou wilt not forget Thy companion in that black hour, which will then lie behind us.' Such trust and clinging, joined with such penitence and submission, could not go unrewarded.

From His Cross Jesus speaks in royal style, as monarch of that dim world. His promise is sealed with His own sign-manual, 'Verily, I say.' It claims to have not only the clear vision of, but the authority to determine, the future. It declares the unbroken continuance of personal existence, and the reality of a state of conscious blessedness, in which men are aware of their union with Him, the Lord of the realm and the Life of its inhabitants. It graciously accepts the penitent's petition, and assures him that the companionship, begun on the Cross, will be continued there. 'With Me' makes 'Paradise' wherever a soul is.

III. The third word from the Cross, as recorded by Luke, reveals Jesus as, in the act of dying, the Master of death, and its Transformer for all who trust Him into a peaceful surrender of themselves into the Father's hands. The circumstances grouped round the act of His death bring out various aspects of its significance. The darkness preceding had passed before He died, and it bore rather on His sense of desertion, expressed in the unfathomably profound and awful cry, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' The rent veil is generally taken to symbolise the unrestricted access into the presence of God, which we have through Christ's death; but it is worth considering whether it does not rather indicate the divine leaving of the desecrated shrine, and so is the beginning of the fulfilment of the deep word, 'Destroy this Temple.'

But the centre-point of the section is the last cry which, in its loudness, indicated physical strength quite incompatible with the exhaustion to which death by crucifixion was generally due. It thus confirms the view which sees, both in the words of Jesus and in the



Evangelist's expression for His death, clear indications that He died, not because His physical powers were unable to live longer, but by the exercise of His own volition. He died because He chose, and He chose because He loved and would save. As St. Bernard says, 'Who is He who thus easily falls asleep when He wills? To die is indeed great weakness, but to die thus is immeasurable power. Truly the weakness of God is stronger than men.'

Nor let us forget that, in thus dying, Jesus gave us an imitable example, as well as revealed inimitable power. For, if we trust ourselves, living and dying, to Him, we shall not be dragged reluctantly, by an overmastering grasp against which we vainly struggle, out of a world where we would fain stay, but we may yield ourselves willingly, as to a Father's hand, which draws His children gently to His own side, and blesses them, when there, with His fuller presence.

### THE DYING THIEF

'And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.'—LUKE xxiii. 42.

THERE is an old and true division of the work of Christ into three parts—prophet, priest, and king. Such a distinction manifestly exists, though it may be over-estimated, or rather, the statement of it may be exaggerated, if it be supposed that separate acts of His discharge these separate functions, and that He ceases to be the one before He becomes the other. Rather it is true that all His work is prophetic, that all His work is priestly, and that His prophetic and priestly work is

the exercise of His kingly authority. But still the division is a true one, and helps to set before us, clearly and definitely, the wide range of the benefits of Christ's mission and death. It is noteworthy that these three groups round the Cross, the third of which we have to speak of now—that of the 'daughters of Jerusalem,' that of the deriding scribes and the indifferent soldiers, and this one of the two thieves—each presents us Christ in one of the three characters. The words that He spoke upon the Cross, with reference to others than Himself, may be gathered around, and arranged under, that threefold aspect of Christ's work. The *prophet* said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, for the days are coming.' The *priest* said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' The *king*, in His sovereignty, ruled the heart of that penitent man from His Cross, and while the crown shone athwart the smoke and the agony of the death, the king 'opened the gates of the kingdom of heaven unto all believers' when He said, 'This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise!'

We shall not attempt, in dealing with this incident, to paint pictures. I have a far more important thing to do than even to try to bring vividly before your minds the scene on that little hill of Calvary. It is the meaning that we are concerned with, and not the mere externals. I take it for granted, then, that we know the details:—the dying man in his agony, beginning to see dimly, as his soul closed upon earthly things, who this was—patient, loving, mighty there in His sufferings; and using his last breath to cry, 'Lord, remember me!'—and the sufferer throned in the majesty of His meekness, and divinity of His endurance; calm, conscious, full of felt but silent power,

accepting homage, bending to the penitence, loving the sinner, and flinging open the gates of the pale kingdoms into which He was to pass, with these His last words.

First, then, we see here an illustration of the Cross in its power of drawing men to itself. It is strange to think that, perhaps, at that moment the only human being who thoroughly believed in Christ was that dying robber. The disciples are all gone. The most faithful of them are recreant, denying, fleeing. A handful of women are standing there, not knowing what to think about it, stunned but loving; and alone (as I suppose), alone of all the sons of men, the crucified malefactor was in the sunshine of faith, and could say 'I believe!' As everything of the future history of the world and of the Gospel is typified in the events of the Crucifixion, it was fitting that here again and at the last there should be a prophetic fulfilment of His own saying, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.'

But mark, here we have a striking instance of the universal law of the progress of the Gospel, in the two-fold effort of the contemplation of the Cross. By its foot was to be seen the derision of the scribes and the stupor of the soldiery; and now here are the two thieves—the one chiming in with the universal reproaches; and the other beholding the same event, having the same circumstances displayed before him, and they influence him *thus*. Brethren, it is just the history of the Gospel wherever it goes. It is its history now, and among us. The Gospel is preached equally to every man. The same message comes to us all, offering us the same terms. Christ stands before each of us in the same attitude. And what is the consequence? A parting of the whole mass of us, some

to one side and some to the other. So, when you take a magnet, and hold it to an indiscriminate heap of metal filings, it will gather out all the iron, and leave behind all the rest. 'I, if I be lifted up,' said He, 'will draw all men unto Me.' The attractive power will go out over the whole race of His brethren; but from some there will be no response. In some hearts there will be no yielding to the attraction. Some will remain rooted, obstinate, steadfast in their place; and to some the lightest word will be mighty enough to stir all the slumbering pulses of their sin-ridden hearts, and to bring them, broken and penitent, for mercy to His feet. To the one He is 'a savour of life unto life, and to the other a savour of death unto death.' The broadest doctrine of the universal adaptation, and the universal intention too, of the Gospel, as the 'power of God unto salvation,' contains hidden in its depths this undeniable fact, that, be the cause what it may (and as I believe, the cause lies with us, and is our fault) this separating, judging effect follows from all faithful preaching of Christ's words. He came to judge the world, 'that they which see not' (as He Himself said) 'might see, and they which see might be made blind.' And on the Cross that process went on in two men, alike in necessity, alike in criminality, alike in this, that Death's icy finger was just being laid upon their heart, to stop all the flow of its wild blood and passion, but different in this, that the one of them turned himself, by God's grace, and laid hold on the Gospel that was offered to him, and the other turned himself away, and derided, and died.

And now, there is another consideration. If we look at this man, this penitent thief, and contrast him, his previous history, and his present feelings, with the



people that stood around, and rejected and scoffed, we get some light as to the sort of thing that unfits men for perceiving and accepting the Gospel when it is offered to them. Remember the other classes of persons who were there. There were Roman soldiers, with very partial knowledge of what they were doing, and whose only feeling was that of entire indifference; and there were Jewish Rabbis, Pharisees, Priests, and people, who knew a little more of what they were doing, and whose feeling was derision and scorn. Now, if we mark the ordinary scriptural representation, especially as to the last class, we cannot help seeing that there comes out this principle:—The thing of all others that unfits men for the reception of Christ as a Saviour, and for the simple reliance on His atoning blood and divine mercy, is not gross, long profligacy, and outward, vehement transgression; but it is self-complacency, clean, fatal self-righteousness and self-sufficiency.

Why was it that Scribes and Pharisees turned away from Him? For three reasons. Because of their pride of wisdom. 'We are the men who know all about Moses and the traditions of the elders; we judge this new phenomenon not by the question, How does it come to our consciences, and how does it appeal to our hearts? but we judge it by the question, How does it fit our Rabbinical learning and subtle casuistical laws? We are the Priests and the Scribes; and the people that know not the law, *they* may accept a thing that only appeals to the common human heart, but for us, in our intellectual superiority, living remote from the common wants of the lower class, not needing a rough outward Gospel of that sort, we can do without such a thing, and we reject it.' They turned away from the

Cross, and their hatred darkened into derision, and their menaces ended in a crucifixion, not merely because of a pride of wisdom, but because of a complacent self-righteousness that knew nothing of the fact of sin, that never had learned to believe itself to be full of evil, that had got so wrapped up in ceremonies as to have lost the life; that had degraded the divine law of God, with all its lightning splendours, and awful power, into a matter of 'mint and anise and cummin.' They turned away for a third reason. Religion had become to them a mere set of traditional dogmas, to think accurately or to reason clearly about which was all that was needful. Worship having become ceremonial, and morality having become casuistry, and religion having become theology, the men were as hard as a nether millstone, and there was nothing to be done with them until these three crusts were peeled off the heart, and, close and burning, the naked heart and the naked truth of God came into contact.

Brethren, change the name, and the story is true about *us*. God forbid that I should deny that every form of gross, sensual immorality, 'hardens all within' (as one poor victim of it said), 'and petrifies the feeling.' God forbid that I should seem to be speaking slightly of the exceeding sinfulness of such sin, or to be pouring contempt upon the laws of common morality. Do not misapprehend me so. Still it is not sin in its outward forms that makes the worst impediment between a man and the Cross, but it is sin plus self-righteousness which makes the insurmountable obstacle to all faith and repentance. And oh! in our days, when passion is tamed down by so many bonds and chains; when the power of society lies upon all of us, prescribing our path, and keeping most of us from

vice, partly because we are not tempted, and partly because we have been brought up like some young trees behind a wall, within the fence of decent customs and respectable manners,—we have far more need to tell orderly, respectable moral men—‘My brother, that thing that you have is worth nothing, as settling your position before God’; than to stand up and thunder about crimes which half of us never heard of, and perhaps only an infinitesimal percentage of us have ever committed. All sin separates from God, but the thing that makes the separation permanent is not the sin, but the ignorance of the sin. Self-righteousness, aye, and pride of wisdom, they—they have perverted many a nature, many a young man’s glowing spirit, and have turned him away from the Gospel. If there be a man here who is looking at the simple message of peace and pardon and purity through Christ, and is saying to himself, Yes; it may fit the common class of minds that require outward signs and symbols, and must pin their faith to forms; but for me with my culture, for me with my spiritual tendencies, for me with my new lights, *I* do not want any objective redemption; *I* do not want anything to convince *me* of a divine love, and I do not need any crucified Saviour to preach to *me* that God is merciful!—this incident before us has a very solemn lesson in it for him. And if there be a man here who is living a life of surface blamelessness, it has as solemn a lesson for him. Look at the Scribe, and look at the Pharisee—religious men in their way, wise men in their way, decent and respectable men in their way; and look at that poor thief that had been caught in the wilderness amongst the caves and dens, and had been brought red-handed with blood upon his sword, and guilt in his

heart, and nailed up there in the short and summary process of a Roman jurisprudence;—and think that Scribe, and Pharisee, and Priest, saw nothing in Christ; and that the poor profligate wretch saw this in Him,—innocence that showed heavenly against *his* diabolical blackness; and his heart stirred, and he laid hold of Him in the stress of his mighty agony—as a drowning man catches at anything that protrudes from the bank; and he held and shook it, and the thing was fast, and he was safe! Not transgression shuts a man out from mercy. Transgression, which belongs to us all, makes us subjects for the mercy; but it is pride, self-righteousness, trust in ourselves, which ‘bars the gates of mercy on mankind’; and the men that *are* condemned are condemned not only because they have transgressed the commandments of God, but ‘*this* is the condemnation, that light came into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.’

And then (and but a word) we see here, too, the elements of which acceptable faith consists. One does not exactly know by what steps or through what process this poor dying thief passed, which issued in faith—whether it was an impression from Christ’s presence, whether it was that he had ever heard anything about Him before, or whether it was only that the wisdom which dwells with death was beginning to clear his eyes as life ebbed away. But however he *came* to the conviction, mark what it was that he believed and expressed,—I am a sinful man; all punishment that comes down upon me is richly deserved: This man is pure and righteous; ‘Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!’ That is all—that is all. That is the thing that saves a



man. How much he *did* know—whether he knew all the depth of what he was saying, when he said ‘Lord!’ is a question that we cannot answer; whether he understood what the ‘kingdom’ was that he was expecting, is a question that we cannot solve; but this is clear—the intellectual part of faith may be dark and doubtful, but the moral and emotional part of it is manifest and plain. There was, ‘*I am nothing—Thou art everything: I bring myself and my emptiness unto Thy great fullness: fill it and make me blessed!*’ Faith has that. Faith has in it repentance—repentance has in it faith too. Faith has in it the recognition of the certainty and the justice of a judgment that is coming down crashing upon every human head; and then from the midst of these fears, and sorrows, and the tempest of that great darkness, there rises up in the night of terrors, the shining of one perhaps pale, quivering, distant, but divinely given hope, ‘*My Saviour! My Saviour! He is righteous: He has died—He lives! I will stay no longer; I will cast myself upon Him!*’

Once more—this incident reminds us not only of the attractive power of the Cross, but of the prophetic power of the Cross. We have here the Cross as pointing to and foretelling the Kingdom. Pointing out, and foretelling: that is to say, of course, and only, if we accept the scriptural statement of what these sufferings were, the Person that endured them, and the meaning of their being endured. But the only thing I would dwell upon here, is, that when we think of Christ as dying for us, we are never to separate it from that other solemn and future coming of which this poor robber catches a glimpse. They crowned Him with thorns, and they gave Him a reed for His sceptre. That mockery, so natural to the strong practical

Romans in dealing with one whom they thought a harmless enthusiast, was a symbol which they who did it little dreamed of. The crown of thorns proclaims a sovereignty founded on sufferings. The sceptre of feeble reed speaks of power wielded in gentleness. The Cross leads to the crown. The brow that was pierced by the sharp acanthus wreath, therefore wears the diadem of the universe. The hand that passively held the mockery of the worthless, pithless reed, therefore rules the princes of the earth with the rod of iron. He who was lifted up to the Cross, was, by that very act, lifted up to be a Ruler and Commander to the peoples. For the death of the Cross God hath highly exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour. The way to glory for Him, the power by which He wields the kingdom of the world, is precisely through the suffering. And therefore, whensoever there arises before us the image of the one, oh! let there rise before us likewise the image of the other. The Cross links on to the kingdom—the kingdom lights up the Cross. My brother, the Saviour comes—the Saviour comes a King. The Saviour that comes a King is the Saviour that has been here and was crucified. The kingdom that He establishes is all full of blessing, and love, and gentleness; and to us (if we will unite the thoughts of Cross and Crown) there is opened up not only the possibility of having boldness before Him in the day of judgment, but there is opened up this likewise—the certainty that He ‘shall receive of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.’ Oh, remember that as certain as the historical fact—He died on Calvary; so certain is the prophetic fact—He shall reign, and you and I will stand *there*! I durst not touch that subject. Take it into your own hearts; and think about it—a kingdom, a judgment-

seat, a crown, a gathered universe; separation, decision, execution of the sentence. And oh! ask yourselves, 'When that gentle eye, with lightning in its depths, falls upon *me*, individualises *me*, summons out *me* to its bar—how shall I stand?' 'Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.' 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.'

Finally. Here is the Cross as revealing and opening the true Paradise.—'This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.' We have no concern at present with the many subtle inferences as to the state of the dead, and as to the condition of our Lord's human spirit before the Resurrection, which have been drawn from these words. To me they do seem fairly to bear the broad and single conclusion that the spirits of the saved do enter at death into a state of conscious presence with their Saviour, and therefore of joy and felicity. But beyond this we have no firm ground for going. It is of more practical worth to note that the penitent's vague prayer is answered, and over-answered. He asks, 'When Thou comest'—whensoever that may be—'remember me.' 'I shall stand afar off; do not let me be utterly forgotten.' Christ answers—'Remember thee! thou shalt be *with Me*, close to My side. Remember thee *when I come!*—*this day* shalt thou be with Me.'

And what a contrast that is—the conscious blessedness rushing in close upon the heels of the momentary darkness of death. At the one moment there hangs the thief writhing in mortal agony; the wild shouts of the fierce mob at his feet are growing faint upon his ear; the city spread out at his feet, and all the familiar sights of earth are growing dim to his filmy eye. The soldier's spear comes, the legs are broken, and in an

instant there hangs a relaxed corpse; and the spirit, the spirit—is where? Ah! how far away; released from all its sin and its sore agony, struggling up at once into such strange divine enlargement, a new star swimming into the firmament of heaven, a new face before the throne of God, another sinner redeemed from earth! The conscious immediate blessedness of the departed—be he what he may, be his life whatsoever it may have been—who at last, dark, sinful, standing with one foot on the verge of eternity, and poising himself for the flight, flings himself into the arms of Christ—the everlasting blessedness, the Christ-presence and the Christ-gladness, that is the message that the robber leaves to us from his cross. Paradise opened to us again. The Cross is the true ‘tree of life.’ The flaming cherubim, and the sword that turneth every way, are gone, and the broad road into the city, the Paradise of God, with all its beauties and all its peaceful joy—a better Paradise, ‘a statelier Eden,’ than that which we have lost, is flung open to us for ever.

Do not trust a death-bed repentance, my brother. I have stood by many a death-bed, and few indeed have they been where I could have believed that the man was in a condition physically (to say nothing of anything else) clearly to see and grasp the message of the Gospel. There is no limit to the mercy. I know that God’s mercy is boundless. I know that ‘whilst there is life there is hope.’ I know that a man, going—swept down that great Niagara—if, before his little skiff tilts over into the awful rapids, he can make one great bound with all his strength, and reach the solid ground—I know he *may be* saved. It is an awful risk to run. A moment’s miscalculation, and skiff and voyager alike



are whelming in the green chaos below, and come up mangled into nothing, far away down yonder upon the white turbulent foam. 'One was saved upon the Cross,' as the old divines used to tell us, 'that none might despair; and only one, that none might presume.' 'Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation!'

### THE FIRST EASTER SUNRISE

'Now, upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. 2. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. 3. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. 4. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: 5. And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? 6. He is not here, but is risen: remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, 7. Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. 8. And they remembered His words, 9. And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. 10. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. 11. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. 12. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.'—LUKE xxiv. 1-12.

No Evangelist narrates the act of Resurrection. Apocryphal Gospels cannot resist the temptation of describing it. Why did the Four preserve such singular reticence about what would have been irresistible to 'myth' makers? Because they were not myth-makers, but witnesses, and had nothing to say as to an act that no man had seen. No doubt, the Resurrection took place in the earliest hours of the first day of the week. The Sun of Righteousness rose before the Easter Day sun. It was midsummer day for Him, while it was but spring for earth's calendar. That early rising has no setting to follow.

The divergences of the Evangelists reach their

maximum in the accounts of the Resurrection, as is natural if we realise the fragmentary character of all the versions, the severely condensed style of Matthew's, the incompleteness of the genuine Mark's, the evidently selective purpose in Luke's, and the supplementary design of John's. If we add the perturbed state of the disciples, their separation from each other, and the number of distinct incidents embraced in the records, we shall not wonder at the differences, but see in them confirmation of the good faith of the witnesses, and a reflection of the hurry and wonderfulness of that momentous day. Differences there are; contradictions there are not, except between the doubtful verses added to Mark and the other accounts. We cannot put all the pieces together, when we have only them to guide us. If we had a complete and independent narrative to go by, we could, no doubt, arrange our fragments. But the great certainties are unaffected by the small divergences, and the points of agreement are vital. They are, for example, that none saw the Resurrection, that the first to know of it were the women, that angels appeared to them at the tomb, that Jesus showed Himself first to Mary Magdalene, that the reports of the Resurrection were not believed. Whether the group with whom this passage has to do were the same as that whose experience Matthew records we leave undetermined. If so, they must have made two visits to the tomb, and two returns to the Apostles,—one, with only the tidings of the empty sepulchre, which Luke tells; one, with the tidings of Christ's appearance, as in Matthew. But harmonistic considerations do not need to detain us at present.

Sorrow and love are light sleepers, and early dawn

found the brave women on their way. Nicodemus had bound spices in with the body, and these women's love-gift was as 'useless' and as fragrant as Mary's box of ointment. Whatever love offers, love welcomes, though Judas may ask 'To what purpose is this waste?' Angel hands had rolled away the stone, not to allow of Jesus' exit, for He had risen while it was in its place, but to permit the entrance of the 'witnesses of the Resurrection.' So little did these women dream of such a thing that the empty tomb brought no flash of joy, but only perplexity to their wistful gaze. 'What does it mean?' was their thought. They and all the disciples expected nothing less than they did a Resurrection, therefore their testimony to it is the more reliable.

Luke marks the appearance of the angels as sudden by that 'behold.' They were not seen approaching, but at one moment the bewildered women were alone, looking at each other with faces of dreary wonder, and the next, 'two men' were standing beside them, and the tomb was lighted by the sheen of their dazzling robes. Much foolish fuss has been made about the varying reports of the angels, and 'contradictions' have been found in the facts that some saw them and some did not, that some saw one and some saw two, that some saw them seated and some saw them standing, and so on. We know so little of the laws that govern angelic appearances that our opinion as to the probability or veracity of the accounts is mere guess-work. Where should a flight of angels have gathered and hovered if not there? And should they not 'sit in order serviceable' about the tomb, as around the 'stable' at Bethlehem? Their function was to prepare a way in the hearts of the women for the Lord Himself, to lessen the shock,—for sudden joy shocks and may

hurt,—as well as to witness that these ‘things angels desire to look into.’

Their message flooded the women’s hearts with better light than their garments had spread through the tomb. Luke’s version of it agrees with Mark and Matthew in the all-important central part, ‘He is not here, but is risen’ (though these words in Luke are not beyond doubt), but diverges from them otherwise. Surely the message was not the mere curt announcement preserved by any one of the Evangelists. We may well believe that much more was said than any or all of them have recorded. The angels’ question is half a rebuke, wholly a revelation, of the essential nature of ‘the Living One,’ who was so from all eternity, but is declared to be so by His rising, of the incongruity of supposing that He could be gathered to, and remain with, the dim company of the dead, and a blessed word, which turns sorrow into hope, and diverts sad eyes from the grave to the skies, for all the ages since and to come. The angels recall Christ’s prophecies of death and resurrection, which, like so many of His words to the disciples and to us, had been heard, and not heard, being neglected or misinterpreted. They had questioned ‘what the rising from the dead should mean,’ never supposing that it meant exactly what it said. That way of dealing with Christ’s words did not end on the Easter morning, but is still too often practised.

If we are to follow Luke’s account, we must recognise that the women in a company, as well as Mary Magdalene separately, came back first with the announcement of the empty tomb and the angels’ message, and later with the full announcement of having seen the Lord. But apart from the complexities of attempted combination of the narratives, the main point in all the



Evangelists is the disbelief of the disciples. 'Idle tales,' said they, using a very strong word which appears only here in the New Testament, and likens the eager story of the excited women to a sick man's senseless ramblings. That was the mood of the whole company, apostles and all. Is that mood likely to breed hallucinations?' The evidential value of the disciples' slowness to believe cannot be overrated.

Peter's race to the sepulchre, in verse 12 of Luke xxiv., is omitted by several good authorities, and is, perhaps, spurious here. If allowed to stand as Luke's, it seems to show that the Evangelist had a less complete knowledge of the facts than John. Mark, Peter's 'interpreter,' has told us of the special message to him from the risen, but as yet unseen, Lord, and we may well believe that that quickened his speed. The assurance of forgiveness and the hope of a possible future that might cover over the cowardly past, with the yearning to sob his heart out on the Lord's breast, sent him swiftly to the tomb. Luke does not say that he went in, as John, with one of his fine touches, which bring out character in a word, tells us that he did; but he agrees with John in describing the effect of what Peter saw as being only 'wonder,' and the result as being only that he went away pondering over it all, and not yet able to grasp the joy of the transcendent fact. Perhaps, if he had not had a troubled conscience, he would have had a quicker faith. He was not given to hesitation, but his sin darkened his mind. He needed that secret interview, of which many knew the fact but none the details, ere he could feel the full glow of the Risen Sun thawing his heart and scattering his doubts like morning mists on the hills.

## THE LIVING DEAD

‘Why seek ye the living among the dead? 6. He is not here, but is risen.’

LUKE xxiv. 5, 6.

WE can never understand the utter desolation of the days that lay betwixt Christ's Death and His Resurrection. Our faith rests on centuries. We know that that grave was not even an interruption to the progress of His work, but was the straight road to His triumph and His glory. We know that it was the completion of the work of which the raising of the widow's son and of Lazarus were but the beginnings. But these disciples did not know that. To them the inferior miracles by which He had redeemed others from the power of the grave, must have made His own captivity to it all the more stunning; and the thought which such miracles ending so must have left upon them, must have been something like, ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save.’ And therefore we can never think ourselves fully back to that burst of strange sudden thankfulness with which these weeping Marys found those two calm angel forms sitting with folded wings, like the Cherubim over the Mercy-seat, but overshadowing a better propitiation, and heard the words of my text, ‘Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.’

But yet, although the words before us, in the full depth and preciousness of their meaning, of course could only be *once* fulfilled, we may not only gather from them thoughts concerning that one death and resurrection, but we may likewise apply them, in a very permissible modification of meaning, to the

present condition of all who have departed in His faith and fear; since for us, too, it is true that, whenever we go to an open grave, sorrowing for those whom we love, or oppressed with the burden of mortality in any shape, if our eyes are anointed, we can see there sitting the quiet angel forms; and if our ears be purged from the noise of earth, we can hear them saying to us, in regard to all that have gone away, 'Why seek ye the living in these graves? They are not here; they are risen, as He said.' The thoughts are very old, brethren. God be thanked that they *are* old! Perhaps to some of you they may come now with new power, because they come with new application to your own present condition. Perhaps to some of you they may sound very weak, and 'words weaker than your grief will make grief more';—but such as they are, let us look at them for a moment or two together now.

The first thought, then, that these words of the angel messengers, and the scene in which we find them, suggest, is this—The dead are the living.

Language, which is more accustomed and adapted to express the appearances than the realities of things, leads us astray very much when we use the phrase 'the dead' as if it expressed the continuance of the condition into which men pass in the act of dissolution. It misleads us no less, when we use it as if it expressed in itself the whole truth even as to that act of dissolution. 'The dead' and 'the living' are not names of two classes which exclude each other. Much rather, there are *none* who *are dead*. The dead are the living who have died. Whilst they were dying they lived, and after they were dead they lived more fully. All live unto God. 'God is not the God of the dead, but of

the living.' Oh, how solemnly sometimes that thought comes up before us, that all those past generations which have stormed across this earth of ours, and then have fallen into still forgetfulness, live yet. Somewhere at this very instant, they now verily *are*! We say, 'They *were*, they *have been*.' There are no have beens! Life is life for ever. *To be* is eternal being. Every man that has died is at this instant in the full possession of all his faculties, in the intensest exercise of all his capacities, standing somewhere in God's great universe, ringed with the sense of God's presence, and feeling in every fibre of his being that life, which comes after death, is not less real, but more real, not less great, but more great, not less full or intense, but more full and intense, than the mingled life which, lived here on earth, was a centre of life surrounded with a crust and circumference of mortality. The dead are the living. They lived whilst they died; and after they die, they live on for ever.

Such a conviction has as a matter of fact been firmly grasped as an unquestionable truth and a familiar operative belief only within the sphere of the Christian revelation. From the natural point of view the whole region of the dead is 'a land of darkness, without any order, where the light is as darkness.' The usual sources of human certainty fail us here. Reason is only able to stammer a peradventure. Experience and consciousness are silent. 'The simple senses' can only say that it looks as if Death were an end, the final Omega. Testimony there is none from any pale lips that have come back to unfold the secrets of the prison-house.

The history of Christ's Death and Resurrection, His dying words '*This day* thou shalt be with Me in



Paradise,' the full identity of being with which He rose from the grave, the manhood changed and yet the same, the intercourse of the forty days before His ascension, which showed the continuance of all the old love 'stronger than death,' and was in all essential points like His former intercourse with His disciples, though changed in form and introductory to the times when they should see Him no more in the flesh—these teach us, not as a peradventure, nor as a dim hope, nor as a strong foreboding which may be in its nature prophetic, but as a certainty based upon a historical fact, that Death's empire is partial in its range and transitory in its duration. But, after we are convinced of that, we can look again with new eyes even on the external accompaniments of death, and see that sense is too hasty in its conclusion that death is the final end. There is no reason from what we see passing before our eyes then to believe, that it, with all its pitifulness and all its pain, has any power at all upon the soul. True, the spirit gathers itself into itself, and, poising itself for its flight, becomes oblivious of what is passing round about it. True, the tenant that is about to depart from the house in which he has dwelt so long, closes the windows before he goes. But what is there in the cessation of the power of communication with an outer world—what is there in the fact that you clasp the nerveless hand, and it returns no pressure; that you whisper gentle words that you think might kindle a soul under the dull, cold ribs of death itself, and get no answer—that you look with weeping gaze to catch the response of affection from out of the poor filmy, closing, tearless eyes there, and look in vain—what is there in all that to lead to the conviction that *the spirit* is participant of that im-

potence and silence? Is not the soul only self-centring itself, retiring from the outposts, but not touched in the citadel? Is it not only that as the long sleep of life begins to end, and the waking eye of the soul begins to open itself on realities, the sights and sounds of the dream begin to pass away? Is it not but that the man, in dying, begins to be what he fully is when he is dead, 'dead unto sin,' dead unto the world, that he may 'live unto God,' that he may live with God, that he may live really? And so we can look upon that ending of life, and say, 'It is a very small thing; it only cuts off the fringes of my life, it does not touch *me* at all.' It only plays round about the husk, and does not get at the core. It only strips off the circumferential mortality, but the soul rises up untouched by it, and shakes the bands of death from off its immortal arms, and flutters the stain of death from off its budding wings, and rises fuller of life *because of death*, and mightier in its vitality in the very act of submitting the body to the law, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'

Touching but a part of the being, and touching that but for a moment, death is no state, it is an act. It is not a condition, it is a transition. Men speak about life as 'a narrow neck of land, betwixt two unbounded seas': they had better speak about death as that. It is an isthmus, narrow and almost impalpable, on which, for one brief instant, the soul poises itself; whilst behind it there lies the inland lake of past being, and before it the shoreless ocean of future life, all lighted with the glory of God, and making music as it breaks even upon these dark, rough rocks. Death is but a passage. It is not a house, it is only a vestibule. The grave has a door on its inner side. We roll

the stone to its mouth and come away, thinking that we have left them there till the Resurrection. But when the outer access to earth is fast closed, the inner portal that opens on heaven is set wide, and God says to His child, 'Come, enter into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee . . . until the indignation be overpast!' Death is a superficial thing, and a transitory thing—a darkness that is caused by the light, and a darkness that ends in the light—a trifle, if you measure it by duration; a trifle if you measure it by depth. The death of the mortal is the emancipation and the life of the immortal. Then, brethren, we may go with the words of my text, and look upon every green hillock below which any that are dear to us are lying, and say to ourselves, 'Not *here*—God be thanked, no—not here: living, and not dead; *yonder*, with the Master!' Oh, we think far too much of the grave, and far too little of the throne and the glory! We are far too much the creatures of sense; and the accompaniments of dissolution and departure fill up our hearts and our eyes. Think them all away, believe them all away, love them all away. Stand in the light of Christ's life, and Christ's death, and Christ's rising, till you feel, 'Thou art a shadow, not a substance—no real thing at all.' Yes, a shadow; and where a shadow falls there must be sunlight above to cast it. Look up, then, above the shadow Death, above the sin and separation from God, of which it is the shadow! Look up to the unsetting light of the Eternal life on the throne of the universe, and see bathed in it the living dead in Christ!

God has taken them to Himself, and we ought not to think (if we would think as the Bible speaks) of death as being anything else than the transitory thing

which breaks down the brazen walls and lets us into liberty. For, indeed, if you will examine the New Testament on this subject, I think you will be surprised to find how very seldom—scarcely ever—the word ‘death’ is employed to express the mere fact of the dissolution of the connection between soul and body. It is strange, but significant, that the Apostles, and Christ Himself, so rarely use the word to express that which we exclusively mean by it. They use all manner of other expressions as if they felt that the *fact* remains, but that all that made it death has gone away. In a real sense, and all the more real because the external fact continues, Christ ‘hath abolished death.’ Two men may go down to the grave together: of one this may be the epitaph, ‘He that believeth in Christ shall never die’; and of the other—passing through precisely the same physical experience and appearance, the dissolution of soul and body, we may say,—‘There, that is death—death as God sent it, to be the punishment of man’s sin.’ The outward fact remains the same, the whole inner character of it is altered. As to them that believe, though they have passed through the experience of painful separation—slow, languishing departure, or suddenly being caught up in some chariot of fire; not only are they living now, but they never died at all! Have you understood ‘death’ in the full, pregnant sense of the expression, which means not only that *shadow*, the separation of the body from the soul; but that *reality*, the separation of the soul from life, because of the separation of the soul from God?

Then, secondly, this text, indeed the whole incident, may set before us the other consideration that since they have died, they live a better life than ours.



I am not going to enter here, at any length, or very particularly, into what seem to me to be the irrefragable scriptural grounds for holding the complete, uninterrupted, and even intensified consciousness of the soul of man, in the interval between death and the Resurrection. 'Absent from the body, present with the Lord.' 'This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.' These words, if there were none other, are surely enough; seeing that of all that dark region we know only what it pleases God to tell us in the Bible, and seeing that it does not please Him to give us more than hints and glimpses of any part of it. But putting aside all attempts to elaborate a full doctrine of the intermediate state from the few Scripture expressions that bear on it, I merely allege, in general terms, that the present life of departed saints is fuller and nobler than that which they possessed on earth. They are even now, whatever be the details of their condition, 'the spirits of just men made perfect.' As yet the body is not glorified—but the spirits of the perfected righteous are now parts of that lofty society whose head is Christ, whose members are the angels of God, the saints on earth and the equally conscious redeemed who 'sleep in Jesus.'

In what particulars is their life now higher than it was? First, they have close fellowship with Christ; then, they are separated from this present body of weakness, of dishonour, of corruption; then, they are withdrawn from all the trouble, and toil, and care of this present life; and then, and not least surely, they have death behind them, not having that awful figure standing on their horizon waiting for them to come up with it. These are some of the elements of the life of the sainted dead. What a wondrous advance

on the life of earth they reveal if we think of them! They are closer to Christ; they are delivered from the body, as a source of weakness; as a hinderer of knowledge; as a dragger-down of all the aspiring tendencies of the soul; as a source of sin; as a source of pain. They are delivered from all the necessity of labour which is agony, of labour which is disproportionate to strength, of labour which often ends in disappointment, of labour which is wasted so often in mere keeping life in, of labour which at the best is a curse, though it be a merciful curse too. They are delivered from that 'fear of death' which, though it be stripped of its sting, is never extinguished in any soul of man that lives; and they can smile at the way in which that narrow and inevitable passage bulked so large before them all their days, and after all, when they came to it, was so slight and small! If these are parts of the life of them that 'sleep in Jesus,' if they are fuller of knowledge, fuller of wisdom, fuller of love and capacity of love, and object of love; fuller of holiness, fuller of energy, and yet full of rest from head to foot; if all the hot tumult of earthly experience is stilled and quieted, all the fever beating of this blood of ours for ever at an end; all the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' done with for ever, and if the calm face which we looked last upon, and out of which the lines of sorrow, and pain, and sickness melted away, giving it a nobler nobleness than we had ever seen upon it in life, is only an image of the restful and more blessed being into which they have passed, —if the dead are thus, then 'Blessed are the dead!'

No wonder that one aspect of that blessedness—the '*sleeping in Jesus*'—has been the one that the weary have laid hold of at all times; but do not let us forget

what lies even in that figure of sleep, or distort it as if it meant to express a less vivid life than that here below. I think we sometimes misunderstand what the Bible means when it speaks about death as a sleep, by taking it to express the idea that that intermediate state is one of a kind of depressed consciousness, and of a less full vitality than the present. Not so. Sleep is rest, that is one reason for the scriptural application of the word to death. Sleep is the cessation of all connection with the external world, that is another reason. As we play with the names of those that are familiar to us, so a loving faith can venture to play, as it were, with the awful name of Him who is King of Terrors, and to minimise it down to that shadow and reflection of itself which we find in the nightly act of going to rest. That may be another reason. But sleep is not unconsciousness; sleep does not touch the spirit. Sleep sets us free from relations to the outer world but the soul works as hard, though in a different way, when we slumber as when we wake. People who know what it is to dream, ought never to fancy that when the Bible talks about death as sleep, it means to say to us that death is unconsciousness. By no means. Strip the man of the disturbance that comes from a fevered body, and he will have a calmer soul. Strip him of the hindrances that come from a body which is like an opaque tower around his spirit, with only a narrow slit here and a narrow door there—five poor senses, with which he can come into connection with an outer universe; and, then surely, the spirit will have wider avenues out to God, and larger powers of reception, because it has lost the earthly tabernacle which, just in proportion as it brought the spirit into connection with the earth to which the tabernacle

belongs, severed its connection with the heavens that are above. They who have died in Christ live a fuller and a nobler life, by the very dropping away of the body; a fuller and a nobler life, by the very cessation of care, change, strife and struggle; and, above all, a fuller and nobler life, because they 'sleep in *Jesus*,' and are gathered into His bosom, and wake with Him yonder beneath the altar, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands, 'waiting the adoption—to wit, the redemption of the body.' For though death be a progress—a progress to the spiritual existence; though death be a birth to a higher and nobler state; though it be the gate of life, fuller and better than any which we possess; though the present state of the departed in Christ is a state of calm blessedness, a state of perfect communion, a state of rest and satisfaction;—yet it is not the final and perfect state, either.

And, therefore, in the last place, the better life, which the dead in Christ are living now, leads on to a still fuller life when they get back their glorified bodies.

The perfection of man is body, soul, and spirit. That is man, as God made him. The spirit perfected, the soul perfected, without the bodily life, is but part of the whole. For the future world, in all its glory, we have the firm basis laid that it, too, is to be in a real sense a material world, where men once more are to possess bodies as they did before, only bodies through which the spirit shall work conscious of no disproportion, bodies which shall be fit servants and adequate organs of the immortal souls within, bodies which shall never break down, bodies which shall never hem in nor refuse to obey the spirits that dwell in them, but which shall add to their power, and deepen their blessedness, and draw them closer to the



God whom they serve and the Christ after the likeness of whose glorious body they are fashioned and conformed. 'Body, soul, and spirit,' the old combination which was on earth, is to be the perfect humanity of heaven. The spirits that are perfected, that are living in blessedness, that are dwelling in God, that are sleeping in Christ, at this moment are waiting, stretching out (I say, not longing, but) expectant hands of faith and hope; for that they would not be unclothed, but clothed upon with their house which is from heaven, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

We have nothing to say, now and here, about what that bodily condition may be—about the differences and the identities between it and our present earthly house of this tabernacle. Only *this* we know—reverse all the weakness of flesh, and you get some faint notion of the glorious body. It is sown in corruption, dishonour, and weakness. It is raised in incorruption, glory, and power. Nay, more, it is sown a natural body, fit organ for the animal life or nature, which stands connected with this material universe; 'it is raised a spiritual body,' fit servant for the spirit that dwells in it, that works through it, that is perfected in its redemption.

Why, then, seek the living among the dead? 'God giveth His beloved sleep'; and in that peaceful sleep, realities, not dreams, come round their quiet rest, and fill their conscious spirits and their happy hearts with blessedness and fellowship. And when thus lulled to sleep in the arms of Christ they have rested till it please Him to accomplish the number of His elect, then, in His own time, He will make the eternal morning to dawn, and the hand that kept them in their slumber shall touch them into waking, and shall

clothe them when they arise according to the body of His own glory; and they looking into His face, a flashing back its love, its light, its beauty, shall each break forth into singing as the rising light of that unsetting day touches their transfigured and immortal heads, in the triumphant thanksgiving 'I am satisfied, for I awake in Thy likeness.'

'Therefore, comfort one another with these words,' and remember that *we* are of the day, not of the night; let us not, then, sleep as do others; but let us reckon that Christ hath died for us, that whether we wake on earth or sleep in the grave, or wake in heaven, we may live together with Him!

## THE RISEN LORD'S SELF-REVELATION TO WAVERING DISCIPLES

'And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. 14. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. 15. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. 16. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him. 17. And He said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? 18. And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto Him, Art Thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? 19. And He said unto them, What things? And they said unto Him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: 20. And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him. 21. But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and besides all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done. 22. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre: 23. And when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive. 24. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but Him they saw not. 25. Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: 26. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? 27. And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. 28. And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and He made as though He would have gone further. 29. But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And He went in to tarry with them. 30. And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. 31. And their eyes were opened

they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight. 32. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?'—LUKE xxiv. 13-37.

THESE two disciples had left their companions after Peter's return from the sepulchre and before Mary Magdalene hurried in with her tidings that she had seen Jesus. Their coming away at such a crisis, like Thomas's absence that day, shows that the scattering of the sheep was beginning to follow the smiting of the shepherd. The magnet withdrawn, the attracted particles fall apart. What arrested that process? Why did not the spokes fall asunder when the centre was removed? John's disciples crumbled away after his death. When Theudas fell, all his followers 'were dispersed' and came to nought. The Church was knit more closely together after the death that, according to all analogy, should have scattered it. Only the fact of the Resurrection explains the anomaly. No reasonable men would have held together unless they had known that their Messianic hopes had not been buried in Christ's grave. We see the beginnings of the Resurrection of these hopes in this sweet story.

I. We have first the two sad travellers and the third who joins them. Probably the former had left the group of disciples on purpose to relieve the tension of anxiety and sorrow by walking, and to get a quiet time to bring their thoughts into some order. They were like men who had lived through an earthquake; they were stunned, and physical exertion, the morning quiet of the country, and the absence of other people, would help to calm their nerves, and enable them to realise their position. Their tone of mind will come out more distinctly presently. Here it is enough to note that the 'things which had come to pass' filled their minds in conversation. That being so, they were not left to

grope in the dark. 'Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them.' Honest occupation of mind with the truth concerning Him, and a real desire to know it, *are* not left unhelped. We draw Him to our sides when we wish and try to grasp the real facts concerning Him, whether they coincide with our prepossessions or not.

It is profoundly interesting and instructive to note the characteristics of the favoured ones who first saw the risen Lord. They were Mary, whose heart was an altar of flaming and fragrant love; Peter, the penitent denier; and these two, absorbed in meditation on the facts of the death and burial. What attracts Jesus? Love, penitence, study of His truth. He comes to these with the appropriate gifts for them, as truly—yea, more closely—as of old. Perhaps the very doubting that troubled them brought Him to their help. He saw that they especially needed Him, for their faith was sorely wounded. Necessity is as potent a spell to bring Jesus as desert. He comes to reward fixed and fervent love, and He comes, too, to revive it when tremulous and cold.

'Their eyes were holden,' says Luke; and similarly 'their eyes were opened' (ver. 31). He makes the reason for His not being recognised a subjective one, and his narrative affords no support to the theory of a change in our Lord's resurrection body. How often does Jesus still come to us, and we discern Him not! Our paths would be less lonely, and our thoughts less sad, if we realised more fully and constantly our individual share in the promise, 'I am with you always.'

II. We have next the conversation (vs. 17-28). The unknown new-comer strikes into the dialogue with a question which, on some lips, would have been intrusive



curiosity, and would have provoked rude retorts. But there was something in His voice and manner which unlocked hearts. Does He not still come close to burdened souls, and with a smile of love on His face and a promise of help in His tones, ask us to tell Him all that is in our hearts? 'Communications' told to Him cease to sadden. Those that we cannot tell to Him we should not speak to ourselves.

Cleopas naïvely wonders that there should be found a single man in Jerusalem ignorant of the things which had come to pass. He forgot that the stranger might know these, and not know that they were talking about them. Like the rest of us, he fancied that what was great to him was as great to everybody. What *could* be the subject of their talk but the one theme? The stranger assumes ignorance, in order to win to a full outpouring. Jesus wishes us to put all fears and doubts and shattered hopes into plain words to Him. Speech to Christ cleanses our bosoms of much perilous stuff. Before He speaks in answer we are lightened.

Very true to nature is the eager answer of the two. The silence once broken, out flows a torrent of speech, in which love and grief, disciples' pride in their Master, and shattered hopes, incredulous bewilderment and questioning wonder, are blended.

That long speech (vs. 19-24) gives a lively conception of the two disciples' state of mind. Probably it fairly represented the thought of all. We note in it the limited conception of Jesus as but a prophet, the witness to His miracles and teaching (the former being set first, as having more impressed their minds), the assertion of His universal appreciation by the 'people,' the charging of the guilt of Christ's death on 'our

rulers,' the sad contrast between the officials' condemnation of Him and their own fond Messianic hopes, and the despairing acknowledgment that these were shattered.

The reference to 'the third day' seems to imply that the two had been discussing the meaning of our Lord's frequent prophecy about it. The connection in which they introduce it looks as if they were beginning to understand the prophecy, and to cherish a germ of hope in His Resurrection, or, at all events, were tossed about with uncertainty as to whether they dared to cherish it. They are chary of allowing that the women's story was true; naïvely they attach more importance to its confirmation by men. 'But Him they saw not,' and, so long as He did not appear, they could not believe even angels saying 'that He was alive.'

The whole speech shows how complete was the collapse of the disciples' Messianic hopes, how slowly their minds opened to admit the possibility of Resurrection, and how exacting they were in the matter of evidence for it, even to the point of hesitating to accept angelic announcements. Such a state of mind is not the soil in which hallucinations spring up. Nothing but the actual appearance of the risen Lord could have changed these sad, cautious unbelievers to lifelong confessors. What else could have set light to these rolling smoke-clouds of doubt, and made them flame heaven-high and world-wide?

The ingenuous disclosure of their bewilderment appealed to their Companion's heart, as it ever does. Jesus is not repelled by doubts and perplexities, if they are freely spoken to Him. To put our confused thoughts into plain words tends to clear them, and to bring Him as our Teacher. His reproach has no anger

in it, and inflicts no pain, but puts us on the right track for arriving at the truth. If these two had listened to the 'prophets,' they would have understood their Master, and known that a divine 'must' wrought itself out in His Death and Resurrection. How often, like them, do we torture ourselves with problems of belief and conduct of which the solution lies close beside us, if we would use it?

Jesus claimed 'all the prophets' as His witnesses. He teaches us to find the highest purpose of the Old Testament in its preparation for Himself, and to look for foreshadowings of His Death and Resurrection there. What gigantic delusion of self-importance that was, if it was not the self-attestation of the Incarnate Word, to whom all the written word pointed! He will still, to docile souls, be the Interpreter of Scripture. They who see Him in it all are nearer its true appreciation than those who see in the Old Testament everything but Him.

III. We have finally the disclosure and disappearance of the Lord. The little group must have travelled slowly, with many a pause on the road, while Jesus opened the Scriptures; for they left the city in the morning, and evening was near before they had finished their 'threescore furlongs' (between seven and eight miles). His presence makes the day's march seem short.

'He made as though He would have gone further,' not therein assuming the appearance of a design which He did not really entertain, but beginning a movement which He would have carried out if the disciples' urgency had not detained Him. Jesus forces His company on no man. He 'would have gone further' if they had not said 'Abide with us.' He will leave us if

we do not keep Him. But He delights to be held by beseeching hands, and our wishes 'constrain' Him. Happy are they who, having felt the sweetness of walking with Him on the weary road, seek Him to bless their leisure and to add a more blissful depth of repose to their rest!

The humble table where Christ is invited to sit, becomes a sacred place of revelation. He hallows common life, and turns the meals over which He presides into holy things. His disciples' tables should be such that they dare ask their Lord to sit at them. But how often He would be driven away by luxury, gross appetite, trivial or malicious talk! We shall all be the better for asking ourselves whether we should like to invite Jesus to our tables. He is there, spectator and judge, whether invited or not.

Where Jesus is welcomed as guest He becomes host. Perhaps something in gesture or tone, as He blessed and brake the bread, recalled the loved Master to the disciples' minds, and, with a flash, the glad 'It is He!' illuminated their souls. That was enough. His bodily presence was no longer necessary when the conviction of His risen life was firmly fixed in them. Therefore He disappeared. The old unbroken companionship was not to be resumed. Occasional appearances, separated by intervals of absence, prepared the disciples gradually for doing without His visible presence.

If we are sure that He has risen and lives for ever, we have a better presence than that. He is gone from our sight that He may be seen by our faith. That 'now we see Him not' is advance on the position of His first disciples, not retrogression. Let us strive to possess the blessing of 'those who have not seen, and yet have believed.'



## DETAINING CHRIST

'And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and He made as though He would have gone further. 29. But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And He went in to tarry with them.'—LUKE XXIV. 28, 29.

OF course, a chance companion, picked up on the road, is dropped when the journey's end is reached. When these two disciples had come to Emmaus, perhaps arriving at some humble inn or caravanserai, or perhaps at the home of one of them, it would have been an unmannerly intrusion for the Stranger who had met them on the road, and could accompany them there without rudely forcing Himself on them, to have inflicted His company further on them unless they had wished it. And so 'He made as though He would have gone further,' not pretending what He did not mean, but doing what was but natural and proper in the circumstances. But Jesus had a further motive for showing His intention of parting company at the door of the house in Emmaus. He desired to evoke the expression of the desire of His two fellow-walkers that He should tarry with them. Having evoked it, then with infinite willingness omnipotence lets itself be controlled by feebleness, and Jesus suffers Himself to be constrained by those whom, unknown to themselves, He was gently and mightily constraining. '*He made as though,*' unfortunately suggests to an English reader the idea of acting a part, and of seeming to intend what was not really intended. But there is no such thought in Luke's mind.

The first suggestion that strikes one from this incident is just this: Jesus Christ will certainly leave us if we do not detain Him.

It is no more certain that that walk to Emmaus had its end, and that that first day of the week, day of Resurrection though it was, was destined to close in sunset and evening darkness, than that *all* seasons of quickened intercourse with Jesus Christ, all times when duty and grace and privilege seem to be very great and real, all times when we awake more than ordinarily to the recognition of the Presence of the Lord with us and of the glories that lie beyond, tend to end and to leave us bare and deprived of the vision, unless there be on our parts a distinct and resolute effort to make perpetual that which in its nature is transient and comes to a close, unless we avert its cessation. All motion tends to rest, and Christian feeling falls under the same law. Nay, the more thrilling the moment's experience the more exhausting is it, and the more certain to be followed by depression and collapse. 'Action and reaction are equal and contrary.' The height of the wave determines the depth of the trough. Therefore Christian people have to be specially careful towards the end of a time of special vitality and earnestness; because, unless they by desire and by discipline of their minds interpose, the natural result will be deadness in proportion to the previous excitement. 'He made as though He would have gone further,' and He certainly will unless His retreating skirts be grasped at by the outstretched hands of faith and desire, and the prayer go after Him, 'Abide with us for it is toward evening.'

That is quite true, too, in another application of the incident. Convictions, spiritual experiences of a rudimentary sort, certainly die away and leave people harder and worse than they were before, unless they be fostered and cherished and brought to maturity and

invested with permanence by the honest efforts of the subjects of the same. The grace of God, in the preaching of His Gospel, is like a flying summer shower. It falls upon one land and then passes on with its treasures and pours them out somewhere else. The religious history of many countries and of long centuries is a commentary written out in great and tragic characters on the profound truth that lies in the simple incident of my text. Look at Palestine, look at Asia Minor, at the places where the Gospel first won its triumphs; look at Eastern Europe. What is the present condition of these once fair lands but an illustration of this principle, that Christ who comes to men in His grace is kept only by the earnestness and faithfulness and desire of the men to whom He comes?

And you and I, dear brethren, both as members of a Christian community and in our individual capacity, have our religious blessings on the same conditions as Ephesus and Constantinople had theirs, and may fling them away by the same negligence as has ruined large tracts of the world through long ages of time. Christ will certainly go unless you keep Him.

Then further, notice from my text this other thought, that Christ seeks by His action to stimulate our desires for Him.

‘He made as though He would have gone further.’ But while His feet were directed to the road His heart remained with His two fellow-travellers whom He was apparently leaving, and His wish was that the sight of His retiring figure might kindle in their hearts great outgoings of desire to which He would so gladly yield. It is the same action on His part, only under a slightly different form, but actuated by the same motive and

the same in substance, as we find over and over again in the gospels. You remember the instances. I need only refer to them in a word.

Here is one: the dark lake, the rising moon behind the Eastern hills, a figure coming out of the gloom across the stormy sea, and when He reached the tossing fishing cobble it seemed as if He would have passed by; and He would, but that the cry flung out over the dark water stopped Him.

Here are two blind men sitting by the roadside crying 'Thou Son of David, have mercy upon us.' Not a word, not even a glance over His shoulder, no stopping of His resolved stride; onwards towards Jerusalem, Pilate, and Calvary. Because He did not heed their cry? Because He did not infinitely long to help them? No. The purpose of His apparent indifference was attained when 'they cried the more earnestly, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon us.'

Here is another. A woman half mad with anguish for her demon-ridden daughter, calling after Him with the shrill shriek of Eastern sorrow and disturbing the fine nerves of the disciples, but causing no movements nor any sign that He even heard, or if He heard, heeded, the ear-piercing and heart-moving cries. Why was that ear which was always open to the call of misery closed now? Because He wished to bring her to such an agony of desire as might open her heart very wide for an amplitude of blessing; and so He let her cry, knowing that the longer she called the more she would wish, and that the more she wished the more He would bestow.

And that is what He does with us all sometimes. seeming to leave our wishes and our yearnings all unnoticed. Then the devil says to us, 'What's the use



of crying to Him? He does not hear you.' But faith hears the promise: 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it,' though to sense there seems to be 'no voice nor any that answered.'

Christ has no other reason in any of the delays and trying prolongations of His answers than to make us capable of larger blessing, because delay deepens our longing. He is infinitely wishful to-day, as He was on that Resurrection evening, to draw near to every heart and pour upon it the whole sunlit cataract of the mighty fact that He lives to bless. But He cannot come to us unless we desire Him, and He cannot give to us more of Himself than we wish; and therefore He is obliged, as the first thing, to make our desires larger and fuller, and then He will answer them. 'He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief.'

Our faithlessness limits His power; our faith is the measure of our capacity.

Lastly, the text reminds us that Jesus Christ is glad to be forced.

'They *constrained*': a very strong word, kindred to the other one which our Lord Himself employs when He speaks about the 'kingdom of heaven suffering violence, and the violent taking it by force.' That bold expression gives emphatic utterance to the truth that there is a real power lodged in the desires of humble hearts that desire Him, so as that they can prescribe to Him what He shall do for them and how much of Himself He shall give them. Our feebleness can in a measure set in motion and regulate the energy of Omnipotence. 'They constrained Him.'

Do you remember who it was that was called 'a prince with God' and how he won the title and was

able to prevail? We, too, have the charter given to us that we can—I speak it reverently—guide God's hand and compel Omnipotence to bless us. We master Nature by yielding to it and utilising its energies. We have power with God by yielding to Him and conforming our desires to the longings of His heart and asking the things that are according to His will. 'Concerning the work of My hands *command* ye Me.' And what we, leaning on His promise and in unison with His mighty purpose of love, desire, *that* will as certainly come down to us as every stream must pour into the lowest levels and fill the depressions in its course.

You can make sure of Christ if two things are yours. He will always remain with us if, on the one hand, we wish for Him honestly and really to be with us all the day long, which would be extremely inconvenient for some of us; and if, on the other hand, we take care not to do the acts nor cultivate the temperaments that drive Him away. For 'How can two dwell together except they be agreed?' And how can we ask Him to come in and sit down in a house which is all full of filth and worldliness? Turn the demons out and open the door, and anything is more likely than that the door will stand gaping and the doorway be unfilled by the meek presence of the Christ that enters in.

The old prayer is susceptible of application to our community and to our individual hearts, When Israel prayed, 'Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest; Thou and the Ark of Thy strength,' the answer was prompt and certain. 'This is My rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.' But the divine desire was not accomplished till the human desire opened the Temple gates for the entrance of the Ark.

‘He made as though He would have gone further’; but they constrained Him, and then He entered in.

### THE MEAL AT EMMAUS

‘And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. 31. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight.’—LUKE xxiv. 30, 31.

PERHAPS the most striking characteristic of the Gospel accounts of our Lord's intercourse with His disciples, in the interval between the Resurrection and His Ascension, is the singular union of mystery and simplicity which they present. There is a certain air of remoteness and depth over all the intercourse, as if it meant more, and was intended to teach more, than appears on the surface, as I believe it was intended. And yet, at the same time, there is, along with that, in most singular combination, the very utmost simplicity, extending almost sometimes to baseness and rudeness of assistance, here. Some poor house of entertainment, possibly, at any rate, some poor man's house, in a little country village; the company these two talkative, and yet despondent disciples; the fare and the means of manifestation a bit of barley-bread; and out of these materials are woven lessons that will live in the Church in all ages. ‘He took bread and blessed it, and brake.’ These are the words, almost verbatim, of the institution of the Lord's Supper. They are the words, almost verbatim, with which more than one of the Evangelists describes the miraculous feeding of the four and the five thousand; and it was the old familiar act, expressed by the Evangelist by the old familiar words, that opened the disciples' eyes, and they knew Him. How simply the process of discovery is told!

It was quite natural that a casual stranger upon the road should not say who He was; it was quite as natural that when He entered into the closer relationship of sitting with the disciples at the table, and sharing their hospitality, they should expect, as indeed they did expect, that as they had been frank with Him, He would be frank with them, and they would find out now who this unknown teacher and apparent Rabbi was. And so, as it would seem, in silence, or at least with nothing of any moment, the meal went on, but all at once, at some point in the meal, the guest assumes the position of the master of the house, takes upon Himself the function and office of host, interrupts the progress of the meal by the solemn prayer of blessing; and whilst the singularity of the action drew their attention, perhaps some little peculiarity in His way of doing it, or something else, opened the door for a whole stream of associations and half-dormant remembrances to rush in, and they remembered what they had heard of the last supper,—for these two were not at it,—and they remembered what they had seen,—miraculous feedings; and they remembered no doubt how He had always done with them in the happy old days when He communed with them. At all events, by the natural action of breaking the bread and sharing it amongst them, the subjective hindrances which had stood in the way of their recognition dropped away like scales from their eyes, and then, without a word, He was seen, and the wearied, hungry disciples rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the story.

Now, I think that, taking the story as it stands before us, and especially mark-



tended parallelism in expression, and I have no doubt in action, between former miracles, the institution of the Lord's Supper, and this neither sacramental nor religious meal in the little village—I think we may get some lessons worth pondering.

I confine myself quite simply to the three points of the narrative:—

The distribution of the bread;

The discovery ;

And the disappearance.

‘He took bread and blessed it, and brake and gave to them, and their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight.’

I. Look, then, for a moment or two at the thoughts which I think are intended to be conveyed to us by that first point—the action of breaking and distributing the bread.

I have said, incidentally, in my previous remarks, that there is a singular air of remoteness, removedness, mystery, reticence, about our Lord's relations to His disciples in the interval of these forty days; and I suppose that that change from the frankness of His former relations and the close contact in which the Apostles and disciples had been brought during all the previous three year

to be the beginning of preparing

suppose that that was intended the preparation of weaning and without Him altogether. And Inness, there is also, as I take it, and, a great depth of significance the events which lead people to symbols, types, exhibitions on of great spiritual truths; and finding symbolical meaning in ally as applied to the Gospels,

has been full of all manner of mischief, yet that there is that element is not to be denied; and whilst we have to keep it down and be very careful in our application of it, lest in finding ingenious fanciful meanings, we lose the plain prose, which is always the best and the most important, yet that element is there, and we have to take heed that we do not push the denial of it to excess, as the recognition of it has often been pushed. And so, from these two points of view, I think the thing should be looked at. The plain prose, then, of the matter is this—that at a given point in this humble road-side meal, our Lord having been guest, having been constrained to enter in by the loving importunity of these people, becomes the host, takes upon Himself the position of the head of the household, and in that position so acts as to bring to the disciples' remembrance former deeds of miracles, and the institution of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, and that was the means of their recognition.

Well, then, if so, I think that we may say fairly that in this breaking and distribution of the bread, there is first of all this lesson—the old familiar blessed intercourse between Him and them had not been put an end to then by all that had passed during these three mysterious days; but they were as they used to be in regard to the closeness of their relationship and the reality of their intercourse. No doubt, in the former years, Christ had been in the habit of always acting as the Head of the little family. When they gathered for their frugal meals, He was the master, they the disciples; He the elder brother, and they gathered about Him. And He assumes the old position; and if we will try for a moment to throw ourselves into <sup>the</sup> position and to see with their eyes, we shall und

the pathetic beauty—I was going to say the poetic beauty, but perhaps you would not like that word to be applied to the history of our Redeemer—the pathetic beauty of the deed. They had been thinking of themselves as forsaken of Him; the grave had broken off all their sweet and blessed intercourse; they were alone now. ‘We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.’ He is gone! Even the poor consolation of looking upon the place where He lies is denied us; for whatever may be doubtful this is certain, that the grave is open and the body is not there. And so they felt lost and scattered; and there comes to them this gleam of consolation—I take my place amongst you just as I used to do; ‘I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.’ We used to sit together at the table; let that be repeated here once more that you may learn, and all the world through you may learn, that the accident of death, which affects only the externals of society, has no power over the reality of the bond that knits even two human hearts with love together, still less a power over the reality of the bond that binds us to our Master. Death vanishes as a nothing in their intercourse; they stand where they were; the fellowship is unbroken; the society is the same; all that there used to be of love and friendship, of peaceful concord, of true association; it abides for ever!

Thus, heavy with meaning and full of immortal hope may be the simplest act wrought with the simplest materials, when the dead Christ who lives takes His old place in the midst of His disciples, and once again as He used to do, parts the bread between them. And, dear brethren, though it has to do with my present purpose, may this

thought not add a wider application to our text; may it not be a comfort and hope to many of us to remember that the grim shadow that stretches athwart our path, and gathers into its blackness so many of our sunny sparkling joys, and takes the light and the movement and the colour out of them, is only a shadow, and that the substance lives in the shadow as it used to live in the sunshine, and passes through the shadow and comes out on the other side, blazing in more than its former lustre, and rich with more than its former preciousness? For all whom we have loved and lost, the death which was a nothing in regard to Christ's intercourse with His disciples, is a nothing, too, in regard to our real intercourse and sense of society and unity with them. They live in Him, and they are more worthy to be loved than ever they were before. He who has conquered Death for Himself has conquered it for us all; and every true and pure human affection rooted in Him is as immortal as the love that binds souls to Himself. Therefore, let us remember that they sit at His table, and that we shall sit there some day too.

II. Well, then, still further, another idea that I think belongs to this first part of our thoughts as to the profound significance of our Lord's here assuming the office and function of host, is this—we are thereby taught the same lesson that we are taught by His institution of the Communion, and taught by the whole details of His relation to His disciples upon earth—that the true idea of the relation which results from Him and His Presence is that of the Family.

He takes His place at the head of the table; He is the Lord of the household, though it be but a household of two men, and they belong to the family and the



society which He founds. Now it seems to me that next to the great lesson which the Lord's Supper teaches us in reference to our individual dependence upon Him, His death as being all our hope and all our life, this is the most important lesson that it teaches—the simplicity of the rite, the fact that it was based upon the Jewish rite, which was a purely domestic one; the fact that our Lord steps into the place of the head of the household by His very presiding at the Passover service amongst His disciples; the fact that He parts the common materials of the common meal and uses them and it as the symbols of His death, and of our life thereby—all that teaches us the same thing which the whole strain of His teaching and the whole strain of the New Testament sets forth—that the Church of Christ is then understood when we think of it as being one family in Him, bound together by the bands of a close brotherhood, relying upon Him as the fountain of its life; having fellowship with one Father through that elder Brother; pledged, therefore, to all fraternal kindness and frankness of communion and of mutual help, and gladdened by the hope of journeying onwards to Him. We cannot, of course, apply the analogy round and round; but of all the forms of human association which Christ has honoured and glorified by laying His hand upon them, and showing that they are symbols of the society that He founds, and of which He is the centre, it is not the kingdom, but the family that is the nearest approach to the Church of the living God.

And you and I, Christian men and women, if we come and sit at that table of our Lord, let us remember that we thereby declare, not only for ourselves that we enter into individual relations of reliance upon

Him, and draw our life from Him, but that we pledge ourselves to the family bond, to be true to the brotherhood, that we declare ourselves the sons of God and the brethren of all that are partakers of the like precious faith. The thing has become a word, a name amongst us. I wonder if any of you remember the bitter saying of one of our modern teachers; he says that he found out somehow or other how much less 'brethren' in the Church meant than 'brothers' out of it. Let us learn the lesson and take the rebuke, and remember that if the Lord's Supper means anything, it means that we belong to the household of faith, and are members of the great family in heaven and in earth.

III. Well, then, still further connected with this first idea of the lesson and significance of the distribution of the bread, I think we may take another consideration, which is, in fact, only another application of the one I have already been suggesting—Where Christ is invited as a guest, He becomes the host.

They constrained Him to abide with them; they made Him welcome to their rude hospitality. It was little—a hut where poor men lay, a bit of barley-bread. But it was theirs, and they gave it Him; and He entered in and supped with them, and then, in the middle of it, the relations were inverted, and they that had been showing the hospitality became the guests, and the table that had been theirs became His. 'And He took the bread and gave it to them.' You have the same inversion of relation in that first miracle that He wrought at Cana of Galilee, where invited as a guest, at a point in the entertainment He provides the supplies for the further conduct of it. You remember the words which contain the spiritual application of the

same thought—‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door, I will enter in and sup with him and he with Me.’ To put away the metaphor, it amounts to this—our Master never comes empty-handed. Where He is invited, He comes to bestow; where He is welcomed, He comes with His gifts; where we say, ‘Do Thou take what I offer,’ He says, ‘Do thou take Myself.’ All His requirements are veiled promises; all His commandments are assurances of His gifts. He bestows that He may receive; He seems to take that He may enrich. They that give to Christ receive back again more than all that they gave, according to the profound words, ‘There is no man that hath left father or mother, or wife or children, or houses or lands, for My sake and the Gospel’s, but shall receive a hundred-fold more in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting.’ The Christ that is asked to come in order to receive, abides in order to bestow.

And then there is a second point, going on with the flow of this little narrative before us, about which a word or two may be said. The consequence of this assumption of the position of master, host, bestower is—‘Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him.’ The discovery of His person follows on the distribution of His gifts.

Now, there is one point to be remarked before I deal with the lessons which I think are capable of being gathered from this part of our subject, and that is, that this narrative gives no sort of support, as it seems to me, to the ordinary notion that, subsequent to the Resurrection, there had passed upon our Lord’s corporeal frame any change whatsoever as the commencement of the glorification of His earthly body. If you observe, the course of the narrative takes pains to point out to

us distinctly, that whatever may have been the reason why they did not recognise Him at first, that reason was entirely in them, and not at all in Him. It is not that He was changed; it is that 'their eyes were holden'; and when they did recognise Him, it is not that any change whatsoever is recorded as having passed upon Him, but 'their eyes were opened, and they knew Him.' And the same thing may be said, as I believe, about the whole of the appearances, mysterious as they were, of our Lord, in the interval between the Resurrection and the Ascension. I do not think, for my part, (although I would by no means speak with confidence about a matter that is so fragmentarily dealt with in Scripture), but I do not think, for my part, that the narrative gives any support whatsoever to the idea of any change analogous to that which takes place upon us at our resurrection, having begun to take place upon our Lord so long as He remained upon earth. The Ascension and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, in His case, are parts of one process. He was raised with the body with which He was crucified; He ascended up on high, and there the glorification, as far as Scripture teaches, is, I conceive, commenced. At all events, there is nothing in our narrative to support the idea of an incipient transformation having begun with the Resurrection.

But, passing by that, which has nothing to do with my main present purpose, I may notice just one or two considerations in reference to this discovery of our Lord. And the first and main one that I would suggest is this—Where Christ is loved and desired, the veriest trifles of common life may be the means of His discovery. We know not what was the special point which brought dormant remembrance to life again, and



quicken the associations of the two, so that they knew Jesus ; even as we do not know what was the hindrance, whether supernatural or whether by reason of their own fault, which prevented the earlier recognition ; but this at least we see, that in all probability something in the manner of taking the bread and breaking it, the well-remembered action of the Master, brought back to mind the whole of the former relation, and a rush of associations and memories pulled away the veil and scaled off the mists from their eyes. And so, dear brethren, if we have loving, and waiting, and Christ-desiring spirits, everything in this world—the common meal, the events of every day, the most veritable trifles of our earthly relationships—they will all have hooks and barbs, as it were, which will draw after them thoughts of Him. There is nothing so small but that to it there may be attached some filament which will bring after it the whole majesty and grace of Christ and His love. Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in remembrance of Him, and do all to His glory. Oh, if we had in our inmost spirits a closer fellowship with Him, and a truer relation to Him, we should be more quick of apprehension. And, as in regard to those that we love, when they are away from us, the fold of a garment, some bit of cloth lying about the room, something upon the table, some common incident of the day that used to be done in company with them, may bring a flood of memories that sometimes is too strong for a weak heart, so with the Lord, if we loved Him—everything would be (as it is to those whose ears are purged) vocal with His name, and everything would be flushed with the light that falls from His face, and everything would suffice to remind us of our love, our hope, our joy. Especially

let us remember that He has entrusted—with strange humility and with wonderful knowledge of us, and with the truest sympathy and tenderness for our weakness—He has entrusted a large portion of our most spiritual remembrance and recognition of Him to material things. Did it ever strike you what a depth of what I may call Christ's condescension there lay in this? 'Take this bread and this wine, and if you will not remember Me because I loved you so well, if you will not remember Me because I died for you, if earthly things and material realities will drive Me out of your thoughts, at least remember Me because and when earthly things and material realities become My agents and My memorials. If you forget the Cross, perhaps a bit of bread will remind you of Me; and I am not too proud to spurn the remembrance that roots itself even in the material things of earth and by such means as that.' 'He took the bread and brake it.' They had listened to all His words upon the road, and it never occurred to them who He was; they had walked beside Him all day long, and even their burning hearts did not make them suspect that it was the Master. It must needs be so—they whom wisdom and truth and His spiritual Presence cannot teach to recognise, may be led to recognise Him by the movement of His hands with the barley loaf, and some intonation of His voice in blessing it. 'This do in remembrance of Me' is the word of that deep pity that knows our frame and remembers that we are dust, and is a word of the most marvellous condescension that ever was uttered in human ears.

IV. And then there is the final consideration here upon which I touch but for a moment. The distribution and the discovery are followed by the disappearance

of the Lord. 'They knew Him, and'—and what? And He let their hearts run over in thankful words? No. 'They knew Him,' and so they all went back to Jerusalem happy together? No. 'They knew Him, and—He vanished out of their sight.' Yes, for two reasons. First, because when Christ's Presence is recognised sense may be put aside. 'It is expedient for you that I go away.' You and I, dear brethren, need no visible manifestation; we have lost nothing though we have lost the bodily Presence of our Master. It is more than made up to us, as He Himself assures us, and as we shall see ourselves if we think for a moment, by the clearer knowledge of His spiritual verity and stature, by the deeper experience of the profounder aspects of His mission and message, by the indwelling Spirit, and by the knowledge of Him working evermore for us all. His going is a step in advance. 'If I go not away the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.' The earthly manifestation was only the basis and the platform for that which is purer and deeper in kind, and more precious and powerful; and when the platform has been laid, then there is no need for the continuance thereof. And so, when He was manifested to the heart He disappeared from the eyes; and we, who have not beheld Him, stand upon no lower level than they who did, for the voice of our experience is, 'Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.'

And for another reason.—When Christ is discerned there is work to be done. 'Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him, and He vanished out of their sight; and . . . they rose up that same hour and returned to Jerusalem' and said, He was known to us

in breaking of bread, and He talked with us by the way. Yes, the vision of Christ binds us to work, and while the more close and intimate and silent communion has its rights and its place in life, it is never to be made a substitute for the active exercise of our Christian vocation to bear witness of Him, and to tell His name to those who need the consolation of His Resurrection, and the joyful news that He lives to bless. So then that meal by the wayside may stand as type and symbol of the way in which we, like the two pedestrians on the road and at the table, may have heart intercourse with Jesus, and may be impelled thereby to labour for Him.

There was another time, after the Resurrection, when in like manner we read that our Lord took bread, and blessed and brake and gave it to them; and that was in that mysterious meal upon the shores of the Galilean Lake, which has always been recognised as having a symbolical meaning—though the exposition and detail have often been exaggerated and made absurd. In the one case it was two travellers who met their Lord; it was in an inn that the recognition took place; it was a brief moment of vision, followed by disappearance, and the disappearance led on to work; but in the other story it was when the morning broke that the Lord was manifest; it was after the night of toil that His form appeared; His words to them were, ‘Bring of the fruits of your labours and lay them upon the beach at My feet.’ And in the light of the eternal morning, after the weary night of toil, they who on earth in their journey and pilgrimage have had Him walking with them as third in their sweet society, and sitting with them in the tents and changeful residences of earth, may expect to find Him



waiting for them upon the shore; and, as one says, 'It is the Lord!' and another dashes through the water to reach Christ, the invitation to all of them will be, 'Come and sit with Me at My table in My kingdom; I provide the meal, and you add to it by that which you have caught.' 'They rest from their labours and their works do follow them.' And so 'they go no more out, but are ever with the Lord.'

### PETER ALONE WITH JESUS

'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.'—LUKE xxiv. 34.

THE other appearances of the risen Lord to individuals on the day of Resurrection are narrated with much particularity, and at considerable length. John gives us the lovely account of our Lord's conversation with Mary Magdalene, Luke gives us in full detail the story of the interview with the two travellers on the road to Emmaus. Here is another appearance, known to 'the eleven, and them that were with them' on the Resurrection evening, and enumerated by Paul in his list of the appearances of the Lord, the account of which was the common gospel of himself and all the others, and yet deep silence is preserved in regard to it. No word escaped Peter's lips as to what passed in the conversation between the denier and his Lord. That is very significant.

The other appearances of the risen Lord to individuals on the day of Resurrection suggest their own reasons. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene because she loved much. The love that made a timid woman brave, and the sorrow that filled her heart, to the

exclusion of everything else, drew Jesus to her. The two on the road to Emmaus were puzzled, honest, painful seekers after truth. It was worth Christ's while to spend hours of that day of Resurrection in clearing, questioning, and confirming sincere minds. Does not this other appearance explain itself? The brief spasm of cowardice and denial had changed into penitence when the Lord looked, and the bitter tears that fell were not only because of the denial, but because of the wound of that sharp arrow, the poisoned barb of which we are happy if we have not felt the thought—'He will never know how ashamed and miserable I am; and His last look was reproach, and I shall never see His face any more.' To respond to, and to satisfy, love, to clear and to steady thought, to soothe the agony of a penitent, were worthy works for the risen Lord. I venture to think that such a record of the use of such a day bears historical truth on its very face, because it is so absolutely unlike what myth-making or hallucination, or the excited imagination of enthusiasts would have produced, if these had been the sources of the story of the Resurrection. But apart from that, I wish in this sermon to try to gather the suggestions that come to us from this interview, and from the silence which is observed concerning them.

With regard to—

#### I. The fact of the appearance itself.

We can only come into the position rightly to understand its precious significance, if we try to represent to ourselves the state of mind of the man to whom it was granted. I have already touched upon that; let me, in the briefest possible way, recapitulate. As I have said, the momentary impulse to the cowardly crime passed, and left a melted heart, true penitence, and

profound sorrow. One sad day slowly wore away. Early on the next came the message which produced an effect on Peter so great, that the gospel, which in some sense is his gospel (I mean that 'according to Mark') alone contains the record of it—the message from the open grave: 'Tell my disciples *and Peter* that I go before you into Galilee.' There followed the sudden rush to the grave, when the feet made heavy by a heavy conscience were distanced by the light step of happy love, and 'the other disciple did outrun Peter.' The more impulsive of the two dashed into the sepulchre, just as he afterwards threw himself over the side of the boat, and floundered through the water to get to his Lord's feet, whilst John was content with looking, just as he afterwards was content to sit in the boat and say, 'It is the Lord.' But John's faith, too, outran Peter's, and he departed 'believing,' whilst Peter only attained to go away 'wondering.' And so another day wore away, and at some unknown hour in it, Jesus stood before Peter alone.

What did that appearance say to the penitent man? Of course, it said to him what it said to all the rest, that death was conquered. It lifted his thoughts of his Master. It changed his whole atmosphere from gloom to sunshine, but it had a special message for him. It said that no fault, no denial, bars or diverts Christ's love. Peter, no doubt, as soon as the hope of the Resurrection began to dawn upon him, felt fear contending with his hope, and asked himself, 'If He is risen, will He ever speak to me again?' And now here He is with a quiet look on His face that says, 'Notwithstanding thy denial, see, I have come to thee.'

Ah, brethren! the impulsive fault of a moment, so

soon repented of, so largely excusable, is far more venial than many of our denials. For a continuous life in contradiction to our profession is a blacker crime than a momentary fall, and they who, year in and year out, call themselves Christians, and deny their profession by the whole tenor of their lives, are more deeply guilty than was the Apostle. But Jesus Christ comes to us, and no sin of ours, no denial of ours, can bar out His lingering, His reproachful, and yet His restoring, love and grace. All sin is inconsistent with the Christian profession. Blessed be God; we can venture to say that no sin is incompatible with it, and none bars off wholly the love that pours upon us all. True; we may shut it out. True; so long as the smallest or the greatest transgression is unacknowledged and unrepented, it forms a non-conducting medium around us, and isolates us from the electric touch of that gracious love. But also true; it is there hovering around us, seeking an entrance. If the door be shut, still the knocking finger is upon it, and the great heart of the Knocker is waiting to enter. Though Peter had been a denier, because he was a penitent the Master came to him. No fault, no sin, cuts us off from the love of our Lord.

And then the other great lesson, closely connected with this, but yet capable of being treated separately for a moment, which we gather from the fact of the interview, is that Jesus Christ is always near the sorrowing heart that confesses its evil. He knew of Peter's penitence, if I might so say, in the grave; and, therefore, risen, His feet hastened to comfort and to soothe him. As surely as the shepherd hears the bleat of the lost sheep in the snowdrift, as surely as the mother hears the cry of her child, so surely is a



penitent heart a magnet which draws Christ, in all His potent fullness and tenderness, to itself. He that heard and knew the tears of the denier, and his repentance, when in the dim regions of the dead, no less hears and knows the first faint beginnings of sorrow for sin, and bends down from His seat on the right hand of God, saying, 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' No fault bars Christ's love. Christ is ever near the penitent spirit; and whilst he is yet a great way off, He has compassion, and runs and falls on his neck and kisses him.

Now let us look at—

## II. The interview of which we know nothing.

We know nothing of what did pass; we know what must have passed. There is only one way by which a burdened soul can get rid of its burden. There is only one thing that a conscience-stricken denier can say to his Saviour. And—blessed be God!—there is only one thing that a Saviour can say to a conscience-stricken denier. There must have been penitence with tears; there must have been full absolution and remission. And so we are not indulging in baseless fancies when we say that we know what passed in that conversation, of which no word ever escaped the lips of either party concerned. So then, with that knowledge, just let me dwell upon one or two considerations suggested.

One is that the consciousness of Christ's love, uninterrupted by our transgression, is the mightiest power to deepen penitence and the consciousness of unworthiness. Do you not think that when the Apostle saw in Christ's face, and heard from His lips, the full assurance of forgiveness, he was far more ashamed of him-

self than he had ever been in the hours of bitterest remorse? So long as there blends with the sense of my unworthiness any doubt about the free, full, unbroken flow of the divine love to me, my sense of my own unworthiness is disturbed. So long as with the consciousness of demerit there blends that thought—which often is used to produce the consciousness, viz., the dread of consequences, the fear of punishment—my consciousness of sin is disturbed. But sweep away fear of penalty, sweep away hesitation as to the divine love, then I am left face to face with the unmingled vision of my own evil, and ten thousand times more than ever before do I recognise how black my transgression has been; as the prophet puts it with profound truth, ‘Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy sins, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done.’ If you would bring a man to know how bad he is, do not brandish a whip before his face, or talk to him about an angry God. You may bray a fool in a mortar, and his foolishness will not depart from him. You may break a man down with these violent pestles, and you will do little more. But get him, if I may continue the metaphor, not into the mortar, but set him in the sunshine of the divine love, and that will do more than break, it will melt the hardest heart that no pestle would do anything but triturate. The great evangelical doctrine of full and free forgiveness through Jesus Christ produces a far more vital, vigorous, transforming recoil from transgression than anything besides. ‘Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the law.’

Then, further, another consideration may be suggested, and that is that the acknowledgment

of sin is followed by immediate forgiveness. Do you think that when Peter turned to his Lord, who had come from the grave to soothe him, and said, 'I have sinned,' there was any pause before He said, 'and thou art forgiven'? The only thing that keeps the divine love from flowing into a man's heart is the barrier of unforgiveness, because unrepented, sin. So soon as the acknowledgment of sin takes away the barrier—of course, by a force as natural as gravitation—the river of God's love flows into the heart. The consciousness of forgiveness may be gradual; the fact of forgiveness is instantaneous. And the consciousness may be as instantaneous as the fact, though it often is not. 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins'; and I believe that a man, that you, may at one moment be held and bound by the chains of sin, and that at the next moment, as when the angel touched the limbs of this very Apostle in prison, the chains may drop from off ankles and wrists, and the prisoner may be free to follow the angel into light and liberty. Sometimes the change is instantaneous, and there is no reason why it should not be an instantaneous change, experienced at this moment, by any man or woman among us. Sometimes it is gradual. The Arctic spring comes with a leap, and one day there is thick-ribbed ice, and a few days after there are grass and flowers. A like swift transformation is within the limits of possibility for any of us, and—blessed be God! within the experience of a good many of us. There is no reason why it should not be that of each of us, as well as of this Apostle.

Then there is one other thought that I would suggest, viz., that the man who is led through consciousness of sin and experience of uninterrupted love which is for-

givenness, is thereby led into a higher and a nobler life. Peter's bitter fall, Peter's gracious restoration, were no small part of the equipment which made him what we see him in the days after Pentecost—when the coward that had been ashamed to acknowledge his Master, and all whose impulsive and self-reliant devotion passed away before a flippant servant-girl's tongue, stood before the rulers of Israel, and said: 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye!' The sense of sin, the assurance of pardon, shatter a man's unwholesome self-confidence, and develop his self-reliance based upon his trust in Jesus Christ. The consciousness of sin, and the experience of pardon, deepen and make more operative in life the power of the divine love. Thus, the publicans and the harlots do go into the Kingdom of God many a time before the Pharisees. So let us all be sure that even our sins and faults may be converted into stepping stones to higher things.

III. Lastly, notice the deep silence in which this interview is shrouded.

I have already pointed to the occupations of that Resurrection day as bearing on their face the marks of veracity. It seems to me that if the story of the Resurrection is not history, the talk between the denier and the Master would have been a great deal too tempting a subject for romancers of any kind to have kept their hands off. If you read the apocryphal gospels you will see how eager they are to lay hold of any point in the true gospels, and spin a whole farrago of rubbish round about it. And do you think they could ever have let this incident alone without spoiling it by expanding it, and putting all manner of vulgarities into their story about it? But the men who



told the story were telling simple facts, and when they did not know anything they said nothing.

But why did not Peter say anything about it? Because nobody had anything to do with it but himself and his Master. It was his business, and no one else's. The other scene by the lake reinstated him in his office, and it was public because it concerned others also; but what passed when he was restored to his faith was of no concern to any one but the Restorer and the restored. And so, dear friends, a religion which has a great deal to say about its individual experiences is in very slippery places. The less you think about your emotions, and eminently the less you talk about them, the sounder, the truer, and the purer they will be. Goods in a shop-window get fly-blown very quickly, and lose their lustre. All the deep secrets of a man's life, his love for his Lord, the way by which he came to Him, his penitence for his sin, like his love for his wife, had better speak in deeds than in words to others. Of course while that is true on one side, we are not to forget the other side. Reticence as to the secret things of my own personal experience is never to be extended so as to include silence as to the fact of my Christian profession. Sometimes it is needful, wise, and Christlike for a man to lift the corner of the bridal curtain, and let in the day to some extent, and to say, 'Of whom I am chief, but I obtained mercy.' Sometimes there is no such mighty power to draw others to the faith which we would fain impart, as to say, 'Whether this Man be a sinner or no, I know not; but one thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.' Sometimes—always—a man must use his own personal experience, cast into general forms, to emphasise his profession, and to en-

force his appeals. So very touchingly, if you will turn to Peter's sermons in the Acts, you will find that he describes himself there (though he does not hint that it is himself) when he appeals to his countrymen, and says, 'Ye denied the Holy One and the Just.' The personal allusion would make his voice vibrate as he spoke, and give force to the charge. Similarly, in the letter which goes by his name—the second of the two Epistles of Peter—there is one little morsel of evidence that makes one inclined to think that it is his, notwithstanding the difficulties in the way, viz., that he sums up all the sins of the false teachers whom he is denouncing in this: 'Denying the Lord that bought them.' But with these limitations, and remembering that the statement is not one to be unconditionally and absolutely put, let the silence with regard to this interview teach us to guard the depths of our own Christian lives.

Now, dear brethren, have you ever gone apart with Jesus Christ, as if He and you were alone in the world? Have you ever spread out all your denials and faults before Him? Have you ever felt the swift assurance of His forgiving love, covering over the whole heap, which dwindles as His hand lies upon it? Have you ever felt the increased loathing of yourselves which comes with the certainty that He has passed by all your sins? If you have not, you know very little about Christ, or about Christianity (if I may use the abstract word) or about yourselves; and your religion, or what you call your religion, is a very shallow and superficial and inoperative thing. Do not shrink from being alone with Jesus Christ. There is no better place for a guilty man, just as there is no better place for an erring child than its mother's bosom. When Peter had caught a dim glimpse of what Jesus Christ

was, he cried: 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' When he knew his Saviour and himself better, he clung to Him because he was so sinful. Do the same, and He will say to you: 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee; Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.'

### THE TRIUMPHANT END

'And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 37. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. 38. And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? 39. Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have. 40. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet. 41. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? 42. And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. 43. And He took it, and did eat before them. 44. And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me. 45. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 46. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48. And ye are witnesses of these things. 49. And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. 50. And He led them out as far as to Bethany; and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. 51. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. 52. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: 53. And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.'—LUKE xxiv. 36-53.

THERE are no marks of time in this passage, and, for anything that appears, the narrative is continuous, and the Ascension might have occurred on the evening of the Resurrection. But neither is there anything to forbid interpreting this close of Luke's Gospel by the fuller details contained in the beginning of his other treatise, the Acts, where the space of forty days interposes between the Resurrection and the Ascension. It is but reasonable to suppose that an author's two books agree, when he gives no hint of change of opinion, and

it is reasonable to regard the narrative in this passage as a summary of the whole period of forty days. If so, it contains three things,—the first appearance of the risen Lord to the assembled disciples (vs. 36-43), a condensed summary of the teachings of the risen Lord (vs. 44-49), and an equally compressed record of the Ascension (vs. 50-53).

I. The proofs of the Resurrection graciously granted to incredulous love (vs. 36-43). The disciples were probably assembled in the upper room, where the Lord's Supper had been instituted, and which became their ordinary meeting-place (Acts i.) up till Pentecost. What sights that room saw! There, when night had come, they were discussing the strange reports of the Resurrection, when, all suddenly, they saw Jesus, not coming or moving, but standing in the midst. Had He come in unnoticed by them in their eager talk? The doors were shut. How had this calm Presence become visible all at once?

So little were they the enthusiastic, credulous people whom modern theories which explain away the Resurrection assume them to have been, that even His familiar voice in His familiar salutation, tenfold more significant now than ever before, did not wake belief that it was verily He. They fled to the ready refuge of supposing that they saw 'a spirit.' Our Lord has no rebukes for their incredulity, but patiently resumes His old task of instruction, and condescends to let them have the evidence of two senses, not shrinking from their investigating touch. When even these proofs were seen by Him to be insufficient, He added the yet more cogent one of 'eating before them.' Then they were convinced.

Now their incredulity is important, and the acknow-



ledgment shows the simple historical good faith of the narrator. A witness who at first disbelieved is all the more trustworthy. These hopeless mourners who had forgotten all Christ's prophecies of His Resurrection, and were so fixed in their despair that the two from Emmaus could not so far kindle a gleam of hope as to make them believe that their Lord stood before them, were not the kind of people in whom hallucination would operate, as modern deniers of the Resurrection make them out to have been. What changed their mood? A fancy? Surely nothing less than a solid fact. Hallucination may lay hold on a solitary, morbid mind, but it does not attack a company, and it scarcely reaches to fancying touch and the sight of eating.

Note Luke's explanation of the persistent incredulity, as being 'for joy.' It is like his notice that the three in Gethsemane 'slept for sorrow.' Great emotion sometimes produces effects opposite to what might have been expected. Who can wonder that the mighty fact which turned the black smoke of despair into bright flame should have seemed too good to be true? The little notice brings the disciples near to our experience and sympathy. Christ's loving forbearance and condescending affording of more than sufficient evidence show how little changed He was by Death and Resurrection. He is as little changed by sitting at the right hand of God. Still He is patient with our slow hearts. Still He meets our hesitating faith with lavish assurances. Still He lets us touch Him, if not with the hand of sense, with the truer contact of spirit, and we may have as firm personal experience of the reality of His life and Presence as had that wondering company in the upper room.

II. Verses 44-49 are best taken as a summary of the forty days' teaching. They fall into stages which are distinctly separated. First we have (ver. 44) the reiteration of Christ's earlier teaching, which had been dark when delivered, and now flashed up into light when explained by the event. 'These are my words which I spake,' and which you did not understand or note. Jesus asserts that He is the theme of all the ancient revelation. If we suppose that the present arrangement of the Old Testament existed then, its present three divisions are named; namely, Law, Prophets, and Hagiographa, as represented by its chief member. But, in any case, He lays His hand on the whole book, and declares that He, and His Death as sacrifice, are inwrought into its substance. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Whatever views we hold as to the date and manner of origin of the Old Testament books, we miss the most pregnant fact about them if we fail to recognise that they all point onwards to Him.

Another stage is marked by that remarkable expression, 'He opened their mind.' His teaching was not, like ours, from without only. He gave not merely instruction, but inspiration. It was not enough to spread truth before the disciples. He did more; He made them able to receive it. He gives no lesser gifts from the throne than He gave in the upper room, and we may receive, if our minds are kept expectant and in touch with Him, the same inward eye to see wondrous things out of the Word.

Verse 46, by its repetition of 'and He said,' seems to point to another stage, in which the teaching as to the meaning of the Old Testament passes into instructions for the future. Already Jesus had hinted at the

cessation of the old close intercourse in that pathetic 'while I was yet with you,' and now He goes on to outline the functions and equipment of the disciples in the future period of His absence. As to the past sufferings, He indicates a double necessity for them,—one based on their having been predicted; another, deeper, based on the fitness of things. These sufferings made the preaching of repentance and forgiveness possible, and imposed on His followers the obligation of preaching His name to all the world. Without the Cross His servants would have no gospel. Having the Cross, His servants are bound to publish it everywhere.

The universal reach of His atonement is implied in the commission. The sacrifice for the world's sin is the sole ground of remission of sin, and is to be proclaimed to every creature. Mark that here the same word is employed in connection with proclaiming Christ's Death as in John's version of this saying (John xx. 23), which is misused as a fortress of the priestly power of absolution. The plain inference is that the servant's power of remission is exercised by preaching the Master's death of expiation.

The ultimate reach of the message is to be to all nations; the beginning of the universal gospel is to be at Jerusalem. The whole history of the world and the Church lies between these two. By that command to begin at Jerusalem, the connection of the Old with the New is preserved, the Jewish prerogative honoured, the path made easier for the disciples, the development of the Church brought into unison with their natural sentiments and capacities.

The spirit of the commandment remains still imperative. 'The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.'

A wise and Christlike beneficence will not gaze far afield, and neglect things close at our doors. The scoff at the supporters of foreign missions, as if they quixotically went abroad when they should work at home, has no point even as regards Christian practice, for it is the people who work for the distant heathen who also toil for home ones; but it has still less ground in regard to Christian conceptions of duty, for the Lord of the harvest has bidden the reapers begin with the fields nearest them.

The equipment for work is investiture with divine power. A partial bestowment of the Spirit, which is the Father's promise, took place while Jesus spoke. 'I send' refers to something done at the moment; but the fuller clothing with that garment of power was to be waited for in expectancy and desire. No man can do the Christian work of witnessing for and of Christ without that clothing with power. It was granted as an abiding gift on Pentecost. It needs perpetual renewal. We may all have it. Without it, eloquence, learning, and all else, are but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

III. Verses 50-53 give us the transcendent miracle which closes the earthly life of Jesus. We cannot here enter on the large questions which it raises, but must content ourselves with simply pointing to the salient features of Luke's condensed account. The mention of the place as 'over against Bethany' recalls the many memories of that village where Jesus had found His nearest approach to a home, where He had exercised His stupendous life-giving power, whence He had set out to the upper room and the near Cross. His last act was to bless His followers. He is the High-priest for ever, and these uplifted hands meant a sacerder



thing than the affectionate good wishes of a departing friend. He gives the blessings which He invokes. His wish is a conveyance of good.

The hands remained in the attitude of benediction while He ascended, and the last sight of Him, as the cloud wrapped Him round, showed Him shedding blessing from them. He continues that attitude and act till He comes again. Two separate motions are described in verse 51. He was parted from them,—that is, withdrew some little distance on the mountain, that all might see, and none might hinder, His departure; and ‘was carried up into heaven’ by a slow upward movement, as the word implies. Contrast this with Elijah’s rapture. There was no need of fiery chariot or whirlwind to lift Jesus to the heavens. He went up where He was before, returning to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. The end matches the beginning. The supernatural birth corresponds with the supernatural departure.

We have to think of that Ascension as the entrance of corporeal humanity into the divine glory, as the beginning of His heavenly activity for the world, as the token of His work being triumphantly completed, as the prophecy and pledge of immortal life like His own for all who love Him. Therefore we may share the joy which flooded the lately sorrowful disciples’ hearts, and, like them, should make all life sacred, and be continually in the Temple, blessing God, and have the deep roots of our lives hid with Christ in the glory.

## CHRIST'S WITNESSES

'Ye are witnesses of these things. 49. And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you : but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.'—LUKE xxiv. 48, 49.

LUKE'S account of the Resurrection and subsequent forty days is so constructed as to culminate in this appointment of the disciples to their high functions and equipment for it, by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Evangelist has evidently in view his second 'treatise,' and is here preparing the link of connection between it and the Gospel. Hence this very condensed summary of many conversations lays stress upon these points—the fulfilment of prophecy in Christ's life and death; the world-wide destination of the blessings to be proclaimed in His name; and the appointment and equipment of the disciples.

The same notes are again struck in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. The same charge to the disciples, when viewed in connection with Christ's life on earth, may be considered as its end and aim; and when viewed in connection with the history of the Church, as its foundation and beginning. So that we are following in the line plainly marked out for us by the Evangelist himself, when we take these words as containing a charge and a gift as really belonging to all Christians in this day as to the little group on the road to Bethany, to whom they were first addressed on the Ascension morning. There are, then, but two points to be looked at in the words before us; the one the function of the Church, and the other its equipment for it.

### I. The task of the Church.

Now, of course, I need not remind you that there is a special sense in which the office of witness-bearing belonged only to those who had seen Christ in the flesh, and could testify to the fact of His Resurrection. I need not dwell upon that further than to remark that the fact that the designation of the first preachers of the Gospels was 'witnesses' is significant of a great deal. For witness implies fact, and the nature of their message, as being the simple attestation to the occurrence of things that truly happened in the earth, is wrapped up in that name. They were not speculators, philosophers, moralists, legislators. They had neither to argue nor to dissertate, nor to lay down rules for conduct, nor to ventilate their own fancies. They were witnesses, and their business was to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. All doctrine and all morality will come second. The first form of the Gospel is, 'How that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was raised again the third day, according to the Scriptures.' First, a history; then a religion; then a morality; and morality and religion because it is a history of redemption.

These early Christians were witnesses in another sense. The very existence of the Church at all was a testimony to that supernatural fact without which it could not have been. We are often told in recent years that the belief in the Resurrection grew slowly up amongst the early Christians. What became of the Church whilst it was growing? What held it together? How comes it that the fate of Christ's followers was not the fate of the followers of Theudas and other people that rose up, 'boasting themselves to be somebody,' whose followers as a matter of course, 'came to nought' when the leader was slain? There is only

one answer. 'He rose again from the dead.' Else there is no possibility of accounting for the fact that the Church as a distinct organisation survived Calvary. The Resurrection was no gradually evolved hardening of desire and fancy into fact, but it was the foundation upon which the Church was built. 'Ye'—by your words and by your existence as a community—'are the witnesses of these things.'

But that is somewhat apart from the main purpose of my remarks now. I desire rather to emphasise the thought that, with modifications in form, the substance of the functions of these early believers remains still the office and dignity of all Christian men. 'Ye are the witnesses of these things.'

And what is the manner of testimony that devolves upon you and me, Christian friends? Witness by your lives. Most men take their notions of what Christianity is from the average of the Christians round about them. And, if we profess to be Christ's followers, we shall be taken as tests and specimen cases of the worth of the religion that we profess. 'Ye are the Epistles of Christ,' and if the writing be blurred and blotted and often half unintelligible, the blame will be laid largely at His door. And men will say, and say rightly, 'If that is all that Christianity can do, we are just as well without it.' It is our task to 'adorn the doctrine of Christ,' marvellous as it may seem that anything in our poor lives can commend that fairest of all beautiful things—and to commend it to some hearts. Just as some poor black-and-white engraving of a masterpiece of the painter's brush may, to an eye untrained in the harmony of colour, be a better interpretation of the artist's meaning than his own proper work, so our feeble copies of the transcendent splendour and beauty



may suit some purblind and untrained eyes better than the serener and loftier perfection which we humbly copy. 'We are the witnesses of these things.' And depend upon it, mightier than all direct effort, and more unusual than all utterances of lip, is the witness of the life of all professing Christians to the reality of the facts upon which they say they base their faith.

But beyond that, there is yet another department of testimony which belongs to each of us, and that is the attestation of personal experience. That is a form of Christian service which any and every Christian can put forth. You cannot all be preachers, in the technical sense. You cannot all be thinkers and strong champions, argumentative or otherwise, for God's truth. But I will tell you what you all can be. You can all say, 'Come and hear all ye; and I will declare what He hath done for my soul.' It does not take eloquence, gifts, learning, intellectual grasp of the doctrinal side of Christian truth for a man to say, as the first preacher of Christ upon earth said, 'Brother! we have found the Messiah.' That was all, and that was enough. That you can say, if you *have* found Him, and after all, the witness of personal experience of what faith in Jesus Christ can make of a man, and do for a man, is the strongest and most universal weapon placed in the hands of Christian men and women. There is nothing that goes so far as that, if it be backed up by a life corresponding, which, like a sounding-board behind a man, flings his words out into the world'; 'Whether this man be a sinner or no I know not'; 'I leave all that talk about heights and depths of argument and controversy to other people, but this one thing I know'—not I *think*, not I *believe*, not I am disposed to come to the conclusion

that—but ‘this one thing I *know*, that whereas I was blind now I see.’ There is no getting over that! ‘Ye are the witnesses of these things.’ And do not be ashamed of your function, nor slothful nor cowardly in its discharge.

May I say a word here about the grounds on which this obligation to witness rests for us? If Jesus Christ had never said, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,’ it would not have made a bit of difference as to the imperative duty that is laid upon all Christian men; for that arises, not from that command, which only gives voice to a previous obligation, but it flows, from the very nature of things, from the message that we receive from our links with other men and from the constitution and make of our own natures.

It flows directly from the gift that we have received. There are plenty of truths which, *per se*, carry with them no obligation to impart them. But any truth in which is wrapped up the possible happiness of another man, any truth which bears upon moral or spiritual subjects, carries with it the strongest obligation to impart it. We have such large insights into God and His love as the Gospel gives us, not that we may eat our morsel alone, or merely sun ourselves in the light, and expatiate in the warmth of the beams that come to us, but that we may share them with all around: ‘God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into our hearts,’ that we may ‘give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’

The obligation arises from the links that knit us all together. ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ Why, the question answers itself. If he is *your* ‘brother,’ you

are certainly *his* 'keeper.' And you cannot shuffle off the obligation by any irrelevant pitting of one field of Christian work against another; still less by any criticism, hostile or friendly, as it may be, of the methods of Christian work, or of the purity and elevation of the character and motives of the workers. Humanity is one, linked by a mystic chain, and every link of it should thrill by a common impulse; and through all the members there should circulate a common life. That great thought is one of the gains that the Gospel has brought us, and in the presence of it and our indebtedness and obligation to every man, woman, and child that bears the form of man, all geographical limits to Christian witnessing seem supremely absurd and incongruous. You cannot get rid of your obligation by saying, 'I do not care about foreign missions, I go in for home ones.' And you cannot get rid of it by chiming in an ignorant second to the talk that has been going on lately, carping at or criticising methods of work. It would be a very strange thing if we had hit all at once, in the very beginning of an enterprise, upon the best of all possible methods; and it would be a very strange thing if the mission-field is the only one where there are no lazy workers and selfish motives and unworthy occupants of high places. All that is true about home as it is about other places. But grant it all, and back comes the obligation based upon the nature of the truth that we have received, upon our links with our brethren, and upon our loyalty to our Master, and it peals into the ears of every Christian man and woman: 'Thou art a witness of these things'; and 'to this end wert thou born again, that thou mightest bear witness to the truth.'

Ah, brethren! the issues of faithfulness to that high function are sweet and blessed and wonderful. A witnessing Christian will be a believing Christian; for there is no surer way to deepen my own convictions about any moral or spiritual truth than to constitute myself their humble servant to proclaim them. Whosoever is a believer should be an apostle, and if he is an apostle he will be tenfold a believer. There is nothing which will give a man a firmer grasp of the Gospel for his own soul than when he finds that, ministered by his humble efforts, it produces in other hearts the same effects which he finds it working upon himself. There is no page in the great book of the evidences of the truth of Christianity more conclusive than that which in the last century has been written by the experience of Christian missions. Let the objectors, Jannes and Jambres, who withstood Moses, let them do the same with their enchantments, and then we will discuss the questions of the truth of the Gospel with them.

Nor need I do more than remind you of the highest of all blessed issues which is yet to come. 'Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.' Alas! alas! how many of us professing Christians will have to stand at last without that 'crown of rejoicing' which they wear who, by their poor work and witness, have won some souls to the Master. Do you, Christian men, contemplate entering heaven alone, or bringing your sheaves with you? It will be sad to stand with hands empty then, because they were idle in the days of the seed-basket and the reaping-hook, whilst those that sowed and those that reaped shall rejoice together. 'Ye are the witnesses of these things': see to it that you do your work.



II. And now, secondly, and briefly, note the equipment of the witnesses for their task.

Our Lord here distinguishes two stages in the endowment. Then and there they receive the gift of the Divine Spirit, as is more fully recorded in John's account of these last days, but that gift, rich and precious as it was, was not yet the full bestowment which they needed for their task. That came on the day of Pentecost. Mark the vivid and picturesque word which our Lord here employs: '*Until ye be clothed* with power from on high.' That divine gift coming down as a vesture, wraps and covers and hides their own weakness, their own naked and poor personality.

I can only say a word or two about this matter. The same collocation of ideas—a witnessing Spirit by whose indwelling energy the Christian community becomes witnesses, is found (and has been explained at length by me in former discourses) in the farewell words of our Lord in the upper chamber. 'The Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall bear witness of Me, and ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with Me from the beginning.'

I need only remark here that the only power by which Christians can discharge their work of witnessing in the world is the power which clothes them from above. The new life which Jesus Christ brings and gives to us is the only life which will avail for discharging this office. Our self-will, the old life of nature, with all its dependence upon ourselves, is nought in reference to this task. But when that divine spark enters into men's hearts, then natural endowments are heightened into supernatural gifts, and new forces are developed, and new powers are bestowed and the

earthen vessel is filled with new treasure. Without it—and there is a great deal of so-called Christian witnessing to-day without it—noise, advertising, skill in getting up externals, and all the other unworthy methods which Christian churches sometimes stoop to adopt, are powerless, as they ought to be. You may accomplish a great deal by fussy activity which calls itself Christian earnestness, and has not God's Spirit in it. But it is no more growth than are what the children call 'devil's puff-balls' which they find in the fields in these autumn mornings; and it will go up in poisonous, brown dust like these when it is pricked.

The one condition of Christian churches doing their Christian work is that they shall be clothed and filled with God's Spirit. Do not let us rely on machinery; do not let us rely on externals; do not let us rely on advertising tricks which might do very well for a cheap shop, but are all out of harmony with the work that we have to do; but let us rely on this, and on this alone. Holding converse with God and Christ, we shall come out of the secret place of the Most High with our faces glowing with the communion, and our lips on fire to proclaim the sweetnesses that lie within the shrine.

One word more and I have done. This clothing with the Spirit, which is the only fitness of the Church for its witnessing work, is only to be won by much solitary waiting. 'Tarry ye,' or as in the original it stands even more vividly, '*Sit ye still* in the city . . . till ye be clothed.' It is because so many Christian workers are so seldom alone with Christ that so much of their work is nought, and comes to nought. To draw apart from outward activity into the solitary place, and sit with Him, is the only means by which we can keep up

the freshness of our own spirits, and be fit for His service. Mary was being trained for Martha's work when she sat at Christ's feet; but Martha could not do hers without being 'troubled and careful,' because she was more accustomed to the work than to the communion that would have made it light.

So, Christian friends, behold your task and your equipment. I beseech you, who call yourselves Christ's servants, to lay to heart your plain and unavoidable obligations. If you have found Jesus, you are as truly and as individually bound to proclaim Him as if a definite and direct divine command sounded in your ears. Your possession of the Gospel as the food of your own souls binds you to impart it to all the famished. The call to witness comes as straight to you as it did to the young Pharisee on the road to Damascus when he heard 'Saul! Saul!' called from the sky.

May you and I answer as he did, 'Lord! what wilt Thou have *me* to do!'

## THE ASCENSION

'And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. 51. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.'—LUKE xxiv. 50, 51.

'And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.'—ACTS i. 9.

Two of the four Evangelists, viz., Matthew and John, have no record of the Ascension. But the argument which infers ignorance from silence, which is always rash, is entirely discredited in this case. It is impossible to believe that Matthew, who wrote as the last word of his gospel the great words, 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth . . . lo! I am

with you alway . . . ' was ignorant of the fact which alone makes these words credible. And it is equally impossible to believe that the Evangelist who recorded the tender saying to Mary, 'Go to My brethren, and say unto them I ascend to My Father, and your Father,' was ignorant of its fulfilment. The explanation of the silence is to be sought in a quite different direction. It comes from the fact that to the Evangelists, rightly, the Ascension was but the prolongation and the culmination of the Resurrection. That being recorded, there was no need for the definite record of this.

There is another singular point about these records, viz., that Luke has two accounts, one in the end of his gospel, one in the beginning of Acts; and that these two accounts are obviously different. The differences have been laid hold of as a weapon with which to attack the veracity of both accounts. But there again a little consideration clears the path. The very places in which they respectively occur might have solved the difficulty, for the one is at the end of a book, and the other is at the beginning of a book; and so, naturally, the one regards the Ascension as the end of the earthly life, and the other as the beginning of the heavenly. The one is all suffused with evening light; the other is radiant with the promise of a new day. The one is the record of a tender farewell, in the other the sense of parting has almost been absorbed in the forward look to the new phase of relationship which is to begin. If Luke had been a secular biographer, the critics would have been full of admiration at the delicacy of his touch, and the fineness of keeping in the two narratives, the picture being the same in both, and the scheme of colouring being different. But as he is only an Evangelist, they fall foul of him for his



‘discrepancies.’ It is worth our while to take both his points of view.

But there is another thing to be remembered, that, as the appendix of his account of the Ascension in the book of the Acts, Luke tells us of the angel’s message; —‘This same Jesus . . . shall . . . return.’ So there are three points of view which have to be combined in order to get the whole significance of that mighty fact: the Ascension as an end; the Ascension as a beginning; the Ascension as the pledge of the return. Now take these three points.

I. We have the aspect of the Ascension as an end.

The narrative in Luke’s gospel, in its very brevity, does yet distinctly suggest that retrospective and valedictory tone. Note how, for instance, we are told the locality—‘He led them out as far as Bethany.’ The name at once strikes a chord of remembrance. What memories clustered round it, and how natural it was that the parting should take place there, not merely because the crest of the Mount of Olives hid the place from the gaze of the crowded city; but because it was within earshot almost of the home where so much of the sweet earthly fellowship, that was now to end, had passed. The same note of regarding the scene as being the termination of those blessed years of dear and familiar intercourse is struck in the fact, so human, so natural, so utterly inartificial, that He lifted His hands to bless them, moved by the same impulse with which so often we have wrung a hand at parting, and stammered, ‘God bless you!’ And the same valedictory hue is further deepened by the fact that what Luke puts first is not the Ascension, but the parting. ‘He was parted from them,’ that is the main fact; ‘and He was carried up

into heaven,' comes almost as a subordinate one. At all events it is regarded mainly as being the medium by which the parting was effected.

So the aspect of the Ascension thus presented is that of a tender farewell; the pathetic conclusion of three long, blessed years. And yet that is not all, for the Evangelist adds a very enigmatic word: 'They returned to Jerusalem with great joy.' Glad because He had gone? No. Glad merely because He had gone up? No. The saying is a riddle, left at the end of the book, for readers to ponder, and is a subtle link of connection with what is to be written in the next volume, when the aspect of the Ascension as an end is subordinate, and its aspect as a beginning is prominent. So regarded, it filled the disciples with joy. Thus you see, I think, that without any illegitimate straining of the expressions of the text, we do come to the point of view from which, to begin with, this great event must be looked at. We have to take the same view, and to regard that Ascension not only as the end of an epoch of sweet friendship, but as the solemn close and culmination of the whole earthly life. I have no time to dwell upon the thoughts that come crowding into one's mind when we take that point of view. But let me suggest, in the briefest way, one or two of them.

Here is an end which circles round to, and is of a piece with, the beginning. 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father.' The Ascension corresponds with, and meets the miracle of, the Incarnation. And as the Word who became flesh, came by the natural path of human birth, and entered in through the gate by which we all enter, and yet

came as none else has come, by His own will, in the miracle of His Incarnation, so at the end, He passed out from life through the gate by which we all pass, and 'was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross,' and yet He passed likewise on a path which none but Himself has trod, and ascended up to heaven, whence He had descended to earth. He came into the world, not as leaving the Father, for He is 'the Son of Man which is in heaven,' and He ascended up on high, not as leaving us, for He is 'with us always, even to the end of the world.' Thus the Incarnation and the Ascension support each other.

But let me remind you how, in this connection, we have the very same combination of lowliness and gentleness with majesty and power which runs through the whole of the story of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. Born in a stable, and waited on by angels, the subject of all the humiliations of humanity, and flashing forth through them all the power of divinity, He ascends on high at last, and yet with no pomp nor visible splendour to the world, but only in the presence of a handful of loving hearts, choosing some dimple of the hill where its folds hid them from the city. As He came quietly and silently into the world, so quietly and silently He passed thence. In this connection there is more than the picturesque contrast between the rapture of Elijah, with its whirlwind, and chariot of fire and horses of fire, and the calm, slow rising, by no external medium raised, of the Christ. It was fit that the mortal should be swept up into the unfamiliar heaven by the pomp of angels and the chariot of fire. It was fit that when Jesus ascended to His 'own calm home, His habitation from eternity,' there should be nothing visible but His own

slowly rising form, with the hands uplifted, to shed benediction on the heads of the gazers beneath.

In like manner, regarding the Ascension as an end, may we not say that it is the seal of heaven impressed on the sacrifice of the Cross? 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name, which is above every name; that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow.' We find in that intimate connection between the Cross and the Ascension, the key to the deep saying which carries references to both in itself, when the Lord spoke of Himself as being lifted up and drawing all men unto Him. The original primary reference no doubt was to His elevation on the Cross, 'as Moses lifted up the serpent.' But the final, and at the time of its being spoken, the mysterious, reference was to the fact that in descending to the depth of humiliation He was rising to the height of glory. The zenith of the Ascension is the rebound from the nadir of the Cross. The lowliness of the stoop measures the loftiness of the elevation, and the Son of Man was glorified at the moment when the Son of Man was most profoundly abased. The Cross and the Ascension, if I might use so violent a figure, are like the twin stars, of which the heavens present some examples, one dark and lustreless, one flashing with radiancy of light, but knit together by an invisible vinculum, and revolving round a common centre. When He 'parted from them, and was carried up into heaven,' He ended the humiliation which caused the elevation.

And then, again, I might suggest that, regarded in its aspect as an end, this Ascension is also the culmination and the natural conclusion of the Resurrection. As I have said, the Scripture point of view



with reference to these two is not that they are two, but that the one is the starting point of the line of which the other is the goal. The process which began when He rose from the dead, whatever view we may take of the condition of His earthly life during the forty days of parenthesis, could have no rational and intelligible ending, except the Ascension. Thus we should think of it not only as the end of a sweet friendship, but as the end of the gracious manifestation of the earthly life, the counterpart of the Incarnation and descent to earth, the end of the Cross and the culmination of the Resurrection. The Son of Man, the same that also descended into the lowest parts of the earth, ascended up where He was before.

Now let us turn to the other aspect which the Evangelist gives, when He ceases to be an Evangelist, and becomes a Church Historian. *Then* he considers

#### II. The Ascension as a beginning.

The place which it holds in the Acts of the Apostles explains the point of view from which it is to be regarded. It is the foundation of everything that the writer has afterwards to say. It is the basis of the Church. It is the ground of all the activity which Christ's servants put forth. Not only its place explains this aspect of it, but the very first words of the book itself do the same. 'The former treatise have I made . . . of all that Jesus began both to do and teach'—and now I am to tell you of an Ascension, and of all that Jesus continued to do and teach. So that the book is the history of the work of the Lord, who was able to do that work, just because He had ascended up on high. The same impression is produced if we ponder the conversation which precedes the account of the

Ascension in the book of Acts, which, though it touches the same topics as are touched by the words that precede the account in the Gospel, yet presents them in a different aspect, and suggests the endowments with which the Christian community is to be invested, and the work which therefore it is to do, in consequence of the Ascension of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter had caught that thought when, on the day of Pentecost, he said, 'He, being exalted to the right hand of the Father, hath shed forth this which ye see and hear,' and throughout the whole book the same point of view is kept up. 'The work that is done upon earth He doeth it all Himself.'

So there is in *this* narrative nothing about parting, there is nothing about blessing. There is simply the ascending up and the significant addition of the reception into the cloud, which, whilst He was yet plainly visible, and not dwindled by distance into a speck, received Him out of their sight. The cloud was the symbol of the Divine Presence, which had hung over the Tabernacle, which had sat between the cherubim, which had wrapped the shepherds and the angels on the hillside, which had come down in its brightness on the Mount of Transfiguration, and which now, as the symbol of the Divine Presence, received the ascending Lord, in token to the men that stood gazing up into heaven, that He had passed to the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Thus we have to think of that Ascension as being the groundwork and foundation of all the world-wide and age-long energy which the living Christ is exercising to-day. As one of the other Evangelists, or at least, the appendix to his gospel, puts it, He ascended up on high, and 'they went everywhere

preaching the word, the Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.' It is the ascended Christ who sends the Spirit upon men; it is the ascended Christ who opens men's hearts to hear; it is the ascended Christ who sends forth His messengers to the Gentiles; it is the ascended Christ who, to-day, is the energy of all the Church's powers, the whiteness of all the Church's purity, the vitality of all the Church's life. He lives, and therefore, there is a Christian community on the face of the earth. He lives, and therefore it will never die.

So we, too, have to look to that risen Lord as being the power by which alone any of us can do either great or small work in His Church. That Ascension is symbolically put as being to 'the right hand of God.' What is the right hand of God? The divine omnipotence. Where is it? Everywhere. What does sitting at the right hand of God mean? Wielding the powers of omnipotence. And so He says, 'All power is given unto Me'; and He is working a work to-day, wider in its aspects than, though it be the application and consequence of, the work upon the Cross. He cried there, 'It is finished!' but 'the work of the ascended Jesus' will never be finished until 'the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ.'

There are other aspects of His work in heaven which space will not allow me to dwell upon, though I cannot but mention them. By the Ascension Christ begins to prepare a place for us. How could any of us stand in the presence of that eternal Light if He were not there? We should be like some savage or rustic swept up suddenly and put down in the middle of the glittering ring of courtiers round a throne,

unless we could lift our eyes and recognise a known and loving face there. Where Christ is, I can be. He has taken one human nature up into the Glory, and other human natures will therefore find in it a home.

The ascended Christ, to use the symbolism which one of the New Testament writers employs for illustration of a thought far greater than the symbol—has like a High Priest passed within the veil, ‘there to appear in the presence of God for us.’ And the intercession which is far more than petition, and is the whole action of that dear Lord who identifies us with Himself, and whose mighty work is ever present before the divine mind as an element in His dealings, that intercession is being carried on for ever for us all. So, ‘set your affection on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.’ So, expect His help in your work, and do the work which He has left you to carry on here. So, face death and the dim kingdoms beyond, without quiver and without doubt, assured that where the treasure is, there the heart will be also; and that where the Master is, there the servants who follow in His steps will be also at last.

And now there is the third aspect here of

III. The Ascension as being the pledge of the return.

The two men in white apparel that stood by gently rebuked the gazers for gazing into heaven. They would not have rebuked them for gazing, if they could have seen Him, but to look into the empty heaven was useless. And they added the reason why the heavens need not be looked at, as long as there is the earth to stand on: ‘For this same Jesus whom ye have seen go into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.’ Note the emphatic declaration of



identity; 'this *same* Jesus.' Note the use of the simple human name; 'this *same Jesus*,' and recall the thoughts that cluster round it, of the ascended humanity, and the perpetual humanity of the ascended Lord, 'the *same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*.' Note also the strong assertion, of visible, corporeal return: 'Shall *so* come in *like* manner as ye have seen Him go.' That return is no metaphor, no mere piece of rhetoric, it is not to be eviscerated of its contents by being taken as a synonym for the diffusion of His influence all over a regenerated race, but it points to the return of the Man Jesus locally, corporeally, visibly. 'We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge'; we believe that Thou wilt come to take Thy servants home.

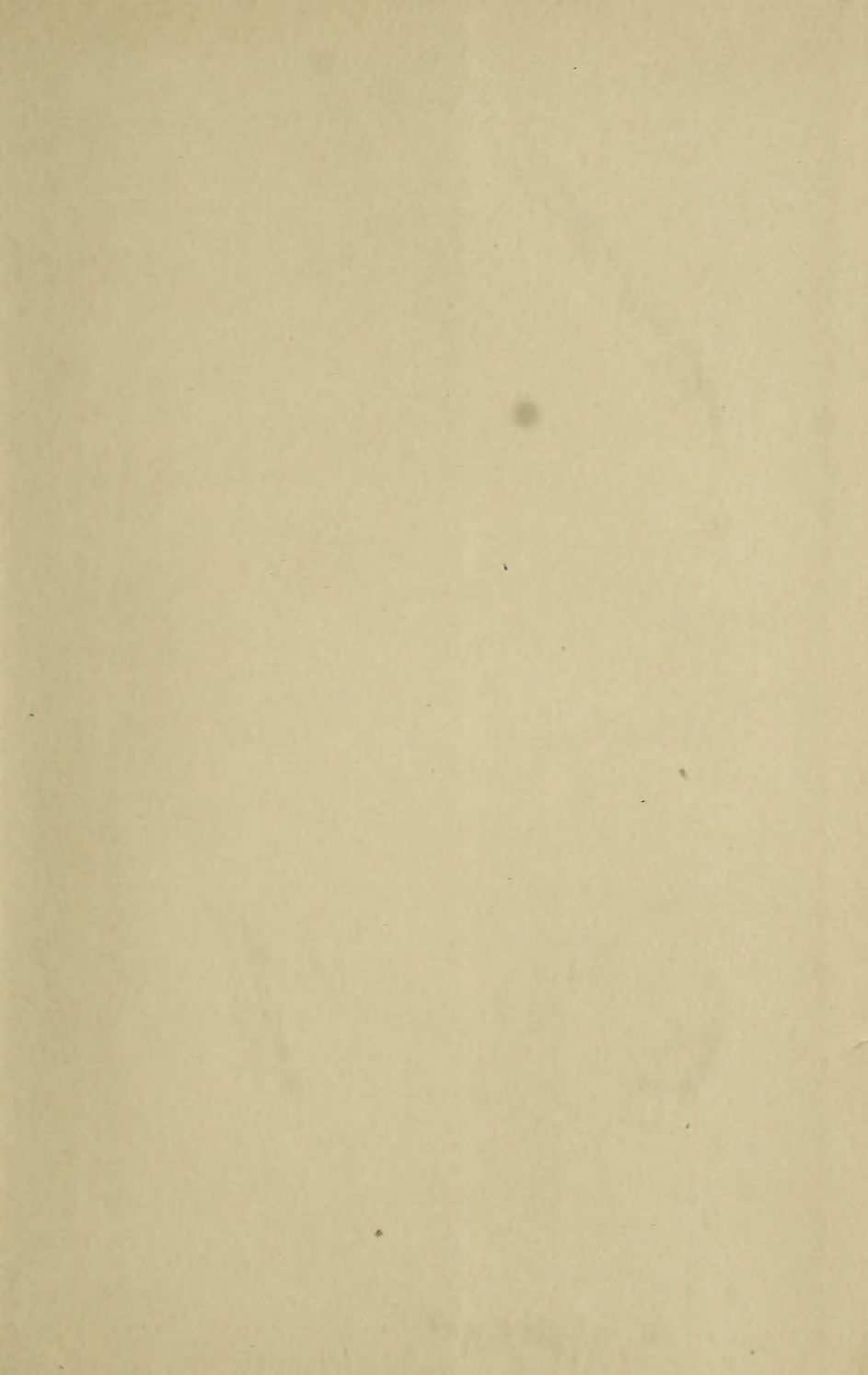
The world has not seen the last of Jesus Christ. Such an Ascension, after such a life, cannot be the end of Him. 'As it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after death the Judgment, so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.' As inevitably as for sinful human nature judgment follows death, so inevitably for the sinless Man, who is the sacrifice for the world's sins, His judicial return will follow His atoning work, and He will come again, having received the Kingdom, to take account of His servants, and to perfect their possession of the salvation which by His Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, He wrought for the world.

Therefore, brethren, one sweet face, and one great fact—the face of the Christ, the fact of the Cross—should fill the past. One sweet face, one great fact—the face of the Christ, the fact of His Presence with us all the

days—should fill the present. One regal face, one great hope, should fill the future; the face of the King that sitteth upon the throne, the hope that He will come again, and ‘so we shall be ever with the Lord.’

END OF VOL. II.







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